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T H E F A T E .

CHAPTER I.

No mistake is more common amongst historians—no mistake more mischievous—than to take for granted, without deduction, all the statements of the satirists and splenetics of past ages, as to the manners and customs of their own times, and of the people with whom they mingled. Half-a-dozen, at least, of the pleasant little passions of human nature lead men—especially men of letters—to decry their companions, their


friends, and their neighbours; nay, even their countrymen and their country. To say nothing of “envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness—” sins common enough to be wisely prayed against—pride, vanity, and levity point the pen, direct the words, or furnish forth a little drop of gall to every man who is giving an account of the times in which he lives, and the country in which he dwells, to those who are living, or to live, at a distance of space or time from himself. It is pleasant to place our own brightness on a dark background; and the all but universal propensity of mankind to caricature, derives an extraordinary zest in its exercise when, by rendering others around us contemptible or odious, we can bring out our own characters in bolder relief.

But there are other—perhaps even meaner—motives still, which induce men frequently to pourtray their own times in broad and distorted sketches. The faculty of admiration is a very rare one; the

faculty of just appreciation a rarer one still : but every one loves to laugh ; every one feels himself elevated by the contemplation of absurdities in others. A vain fondness for the grotesque lurks in the bosoms of most men ; and a consciousness that sly, or even gross, satire, and delicate, or coarse, caricature are the best means of giving pleasure to the great mass of mankind, is, probably, one reason why we find such depreciatory exaggeration in the writings of all those who have given pictures of their own times. The letters of Petrarch, the statements of Hollingshed, the pictures of Hogarth, the romances of Smollett and Fielding, all furnish, it is true, certain sketches of their own times from which we can derive some valuable information, but so distorted by passion, by prejudice, by a satirical spirit, or a love of the ridiculous, that the portrait can no more be relied on in its details than Bunbury's caricature of a Cantab for the general appearance of Cambridge scholars.

To give such pictures, is mischievous in itself ; but I cannot help thinking that for an historian to follow them, without allowance, is more mischievous still. If there be a deviation on either side—though any deviation should be avoided, if possible—surely it would be better for every moral object to paint the past more bright, rather than more foul, as the past alone contains the just objects of imitation, though we may emulate contemporary virtue, or aspire to ideal perfection in the future.


Truth—plain, simple truth—with such deductions from the verities of the past as may tend to benefit mankind in the present and the future, forms all that the historian can desire ; but he might as well hope to draw truth from the pages of the satirists of any age, as a future portrait-painter might represent Lord John Russell or Lord Brougham from the caricatures in “Punch,” where a certain likeness is kept up, but every peculiarity is exaggerated with the grossest extravagance.



I enter my caveat against the caricature given of the state of England in the year 1685 by Mr. Macaulay in his great and beautiful historical romance ; and especially against that part of it which refers to the English country gentlemen of those times, and to the English country clergy. That such men did exist as those from whom he has drawn his statement, there can be no doubt ; that they did exist in a greater proportion than at present there can be no doubt either ; but that the great mass were such as he has represented, may be very safely denied. Pickwicks, and Tupmans, and Winkles, are full of truth ; but society is not made up of these ; and the reign of Victoria would appear very ill in history, if, by misfortune, it should have for its future historian, one inclined to paint the state of England in 1850 from similar sources to those which have been pressed into the service of Mr. Macaulay.

Nor does his reasoning afford any support to his statements ; for when important

elements are left out of calculation, the result can never be admitted. Thus, when he says, "A country gentleman who witnessed the Revolution, was probably in receipt of about a fourth part of the rent which his acres now yield to his posterity, and was, therefore, as compared with his posterity, a poor man, generally under the necessity of residing, with little interruption, on his estate," the historian forgets to mention what was the comparative value of money at the period he speaks of; and therefore cannot draw, as a fair inference from the amount of rent, that the country gentleman of those days was condemned by poverty to perpetual seclusion in the country, which is, in fact, what he attempts to shew. The tastes, the habits, of a country gentleman of that period, kept him probably more in the country; but it was not poverty that did so. Even in the eighteenth century, we find gentlemen, of an estate producing two thousand pounds a-year, keeping a pack of hounds without burden-



ing their property ; and every true picture of country life which has descended to us, shows that the country gentlemen in general lived more at their ease than the same class in the present day, and were as numerous as now in proportion to the population. If their engagements were not so refined, it was because the age was not so refined ; and though the picture of Squire Allworthy may be a pleasant exaggeration on the one hand, that of Squire Western is an unpleasant caricature on the other, while the truth lay between ; and a multitude of country gentlemen existed, of a very fair degree of polish, without all the refined virtues of the one, or the brutal coarseness of the other.

CHAPTER II.

ON the borders of Lincolnshire stood an old building which had preserved the name bestowed on it more than two centuries before, though the purpose which had given significance and propriety to that name, had passed away. It was a long, tall edifice of stone, somewhat like the body of a church ; and, as if to give it more resemblance still to a religious edifice, another building had been added to the end of the first, a story higher, and having some resemblance to a tower. This additional part was built of brick ; but moss and lichen had reduced both stone

and brick to very nearly one colour ; for though, when viewed nearer, a variety of hues were to be discovered in the cryptogamous vegetation which covered the walls, the general tint at a distance was a brownish grey. The windows in the longer portion of the building were placed in pointed arches somewhat rudely and carelessly decorated : those in the taller and squarer portion were, on the contrary, generally square, with a stone label above them, though some had that flattened arch peculiarly characteristic of the worst Tudor architecture. The whole building was not very large ; and it was clear, at first sight, that the long portion was devoted to barns, stables, cart-houses, &c., while the other was separated for human habitation.

At the distance of some sixty or seventy yards from the house, a long, triple row of old elms topped a high bank, affording nesting place for innumerable rooks ; and a little, clear stream, not unconscious of trout, ran babbling along, mixing its melody

with the music of the birds. A stone wall, breast high, and in some decay, encircled the whole, with two large uncouth posts, ornamented with fragments of urns, giving entrance, unimpeded by any gate between them, to any one who might wish to approach the front door of the dwelling house. Probably, a gate *had* been there once; for some iron work on the posts seemed to show that they had been intended to support something; but, if so, the gate had long been gone—made into pikes in the civil war, for aught I know.

The scene around this old house, when viewed from the top of the bank, was desolate enough. A wide, fenny piece of unenclosed land stretched out far towards the north and east, only interrupted, at the distance of some three miles, by an undulating rise of woodland. Nevertheless, the coloring was often fine, especially on autumnal evenings, when the moor assumed a solemn, intense, blue tint, and the pools

and distant river gleamed like rubies in the rich light of the setting sun.

On the other side, behind the house, the country had a more cheerful look, having some well-cultivated fields sloping up, as the land rose to the west, with many a knoll, and scattered tree, and thicker wood beyond ; while, sweeping away southward, were hedge-rows, and a hamlet here and there, the tower of a village church, and the chimneys of a distant manor-house.

Such was the aspect of the building, and the scene around it. Now let us say a word of its history, and its name.

In former years, when Plantagenet was the royal name of England, when Popes were powerful in the land, and it was sinful to eat beef on Friday, amongst the best fed and best taught people of the country were the abbots and priors of the various monasteries, who, notwithstanding vigil, prayer, and fasting, nay, even occasional

vows of voluntary poverty, got fat, prosperous, and wealthy. Large domains had these good men, and productive fields, besides tythes and dues of various sorts which were usually paid in kind. As the abbot and the abbot's bailiff, and other officers, made their little profit on the sale of such commodities as they did not consume ; and as, in a benevolent and christian spirit, they took good heed to have plentiful stores laid up to aid the people in time of scarcity ; it was requisite that they should be provided with barns and garnerers, to preserve the fruits of the earth which they received. These barns were called Granges ; and very often had a small farm attached to them. The masonry of the edifice was generally solid, and the style of the architecture in some degree ecclesiastical. When the Grange was built near the Abbey, it generally stood alone without any dwelling-house attached ; but when it was at a distance, on one of the abbey farms, as was frequently the case, a substantial mansion

was often added by the care of the monks; and a farmer who had pretty daughters, or who brewed good beer, generally contrived to get very comfortably accommodated there.

The house I have been describing, was still called the Grange; and such as I have stated, had been its original destination. The long building had been the real Grange, or Barn, of a neighbouring Abbey: the taller building had been added afterwards, for the convenience of the abbot's bailiff. When the monasteries were suppressed by the arch plunderer, Henry VIII. we all know how many and how great were those who shared in the pickings of the defunct fowl of Rome: The Grange and the farm attached to it, together with much other valuable property, fell to the lot of a nobleman in the neighbourhood, who bestowed it upon a younger son; and, from that younger son, it had descended in unbroken line to its present possessor. The fortunes of the house had varied considerably: some

had proved gamblers ; some had been soldiers ; some had been profuse, some penurious ; and some had even made love-matches. The farm, and the house, and the family, were now all in a state, not very prosperous, not very disastrous ; somewhere between decay and preservation. It was lucky, indeed, that the owner thereof had but one son ; for had he been blessed with as many babes as a curate, there might have been some danger of a dearth in the pantry. As it was, he could afford comforts : an occasional bottle, even of claret. Punch was a frequent accessory to digestion ; and good sound ale, which would have done honour to any Cambridge audit, was never wanting for a friend or a poor man.

The owner of that house, however, was a man of a peculiar disposition, which prevented him from enjoying, as much as he might have done, the favourable position in which fate had placed him. I do not mean to say that he was of a discontented mood, nor that he was precisely a melancholy

man. He was whimsical—somewhat cynical ; and certain it is, he had always the perverse skill, though a good and kind man at heart, of discovering the bad or the ridiculous side of everything. He was a learned man withal, and could fit a subject of discourse with a quaint quotation, often twisted considerably from its just meaning, but always serving his own purpose very well. He had passed a long time at the University, and gained odd habits, and some distinction. He had then suddenly married a very beautiful woman of good family, and small fortune. For her sake, he determined to exert himself—to strive with the crowd for honors and distinctions—to place her in the same position in which his ancestors and hers had stood. For this purpose, he went to the bar, around which he had been indolently buzzing for some time previously. He was engaged in one cause : circumstances favoured him : the senior counsel was taken ill : the weight, the responsibility, fell upon the junior ; but with

them the opportunity. He made a brilliant speech—a powerful argument—carried court and jury along with him—and saved his client from fine and imprisonment.

Then came the heaviest blow of his life. His wife died, and left him with one infant. The law was thrown up—the object of ambition was gone—all his old habits returned, more wrinkled and stiff than ever. He retired to his small property at the Grange; and there he had lived ever since, cultivating his acres and his oddities.

But let us venture within the old walls, and see the proprietor in his glory. Mark the knocker as you pass, reader—that great truncheon of iron, I mean, suspended by a ring, surrounded by a marvellously cut plate of steel, with a large boss at the lower part just beneath the obtuse end of the hammer. The door, too, is worth a look, with oak enough in it to build a modern house. Then we come to a low passage, none of the widest, and diminished

in space by two chairs with tall backs, each back having round rods or bars joining the two sides together, ornamented with round, moveable pieces of wood, which may be rattled from side to side, and resemble exactly those upon the curious machine with which, in popular schools, we teach the infant mind to count, now that we have discarded nature's original numeration-table furnished by our own ten fingers. Between the chairs, in order not to leave space for intruders to pass too readily, is a suit of complete armour, somewhat rusty ; while, on the other side, are three cuirasses, and three steel caps, with sundry pikes, swords, and gauntlets, arranged with some taste, and garnished with much dust and many cobwebs.

Now, take care ! There is a step—not up, but down ; for the floor is made to accommodate the ground, not the ground levelled to accommodate the floor. Then, this small door on the left hand, with sundry names and capital letters carved in

it with a penknife, to prove the universality of idle habits in all ages and countries, leads into the room where we would be.

But before we enter, let us take a glance around.


Seated at a small table, near a fire, with one foot resting on the massive, carved, brass dog's head, which ornaments the end of the andiron, at the imminent risk of burning his slipper, and with the other drawn up under his chair—which, by the way, was as tall and stiff-backed as a corporal of dragoons, and would have been a most uncomfortable seat had it not been well cushioned, and partially covered with Genoa velvet—sat a gentleman of perhaps five-and-fifty years of age. He wore his own grey hair, though wigs were even then beginning to domineer over the crown ; and the somewhat slovenly easiness of his whole apparel forbade the supposition that he would even have consented to embarrass his cranium with a load of horsehair, only fitted to stew the brains of the wearer into

an unintellectual mass of jelly. He had upon his back a brocade dressing-gown, which might have been handsome at some former epoch—say, twenty years before ; but which, though not actually dirty, was faded, and, though not actually ragged, was patched. He wore stockings of grey thread, and breeches of a chocolate colour ; and, by some antipathy between the waistband thereof, and the fawn-coloured silk-waistcoat above, a large portion of that part of his shirt which covered the pit of his stomach, was exposed to view ; but then that shirt was of the very finest and cleanest linen. Every man has somewhere a point of coxcombry about him ; and fine linen was his weak spot. His ruffles and his cravat were of lawn, and white as snow.

On the table before him was a large candle, shedding its light upon an open book ; and ever and anon, as he read, he raised one finger and rubbed a spot a little above the temple, which, by long labour of the same

kind, he had contrived to render quite bald.

The room was by no means a large one, and the ceiling was of black oak, which rendered its appearance even smaller than the reality ; but the greater part of three sides was covered with book-cases ; and many curious and antiquated pieces of furniture encumbered the floor. The chairs were of all sizes and all descriptions then in use ; the tables were equally numerous and various. The latter, moreover, were loaded with large glass tankards, curious specimens of Delft ware—some exceedingly coarse in material and colouring, but remarkable in device or ornament,—richly covered or wooden-bound books, strange daggers and fragments of goldsmiths'-work, with one or two pieces of china and enamel of great value, besides coins and small pictures inestimable in the eyes of an antiquary. The large centre table was tolerably clear ; for supper time was approaching, and on it he took his frugal




evening meal, although he had a dining room on the other side of the passage, furnished with the most remarkable simplicity, and paved with hard flag stones. It was enough for him, however, to be disturbed once a-day, and he visited what was called the eating hall no oftener.

This elderly gentleman, however, was not the only tenant of the room. On the other side, as far as he could get from the fire (for the evening, though an autumnal one, was by no means cold), sat the son of the master of the house : a young man of about one-and-twenty years of age. The father might have been pronounced a good looking man, had he taken any care of his personal appearance ; but the son had inherited his mother's beauty, with a more manly character ; and although youth was still very evident, though the moustache was scant and downy, and the face fair and unwrinkled, there was a good deal of thoughtful decision about the eyes, and a

world of resolute firmness about the mouth and chin.

He too was reading ; and sometimes the book beneath his eyes excited a smile, sometimes engaged his attention deeply ; but, more frequently, his mind seemed to wander from the page. He would fall into deep fits of thought ; he would play with a knife which lay beside him ; but, more often still, he raised his eyes and fixed them anxiously—thoughtfully—upon his father's face. It seemed as if there was something working in his mind to which he desired to give utterance ; and it was not long before he spoke.

But let us reserve what followed for another chapter. It affected too much the fate and the immediate course of the personage before us to be treated briefly at the end of a merely descriptive passage.



CHAPTER III.

THE father looked up from his book, and closed it with a slap, saying,

“ ‘*Et tamen alter, si fecisset idem, caderet sub iudice morum.*’ It is a bad book ; and, if another had written it, he would have been put in the stocks, or whipped at the cart’s tail. But this man will get fame, and honor, and wealth, by it. Not that I am affected by the *tristitia de bonis alienis*. Each man should rejoice when he sees a worthy neighbour successful, even if he may detect some flaw or fault in his performances ; for

envy is the basest and most destructive of passions. *Nulla pestis humano generi pluris stetit* ; but when one sees a man of some ability direct all his efforts to produce that which can only work evil to his fellow creatures, gild vice, decorate folly, and corroborate falsehood, and yet be lauded and rewarded, it excites anger, and produces a sad conviction of the unworthiness of our kind."

This was not a very auspicious commencement of the conversation to which the young man was looking with some anxiety for an opening to propound certain schemes and purposes of his own. Nevertheless, it was some satisfaction to him that his father had left off reading ; for that was an occupation not to be interrupted ; and he hastened to reply, in hopes that some turn would afford the opportunity he desired.

"Bad books are sometimes very useful, I think, sir," he said, with a good-humoured smile.

“Ever in paradoxes, Ralph!” said his father. How may they be useful, boy?”

“By giving better men than their authors occasion to refute them,” replied Ralph; “not that I mean to say,” he continued, knowing the peculiar, argumentative character of his father’s mind, “that the mere refutation would be sufficient; for that would leave matters just where they were before”— (his father waved his hand); “but because, in the act of refutation, a thousand new arguments would be drawn forth in favour of truth and right, which might not occur to the multitude if no controversy ever elicited them.”

“You have not put your case as strongly as you might have done, Ralph,” remarked his father. “Complete refutation would not absolutely leave matters exactly where they were before. It is with a truth, with a principle, as with a sword-blade. Its strength cannot be fully known till it is tried. True, the strength, whatever it is, remains the same; but, to those who have to use it, the trial

adds confidence. It is not of half as much importance to be armed with a good sword, as to have one and *know* that it is good from having proved it. The abstract truth of any proposition remains the same, whether it be assailed, and defended, or not; but the question before us involves another element: namely, the effect of the assault and defence upon the minds of men; and, therefore, as you say, books assailing truth may sometimes be useful by calling forth a complete vindication of the truth. But the man who writes them is equally culpable; for even were we to admit that he might desire to establish truth more firmly by calling forth a strong defence, he would fall into the offence of promulgating falsehood with the knowledge that it was false; and truth refuses to be served by deceit."

He paused for a moment; and his son carefully abstained from furnishing new matter for subtle arguments, well knowing that his father had no mercy upon hobby-horses.

At length, the old gentleman laid his hand smilingly upon the volume, saying :—

“ I do not suppose that you intend to refute this work, Ralph ; first, because I imagine that you do not know what it is, and next, because I have remarked anything but a ‘ vaulting ambition ’ in you, my dear boy. Indeed, perhaps too little. Now,

‘ Ambire semper stulta confidentia est,
Ambire nunquam deses arrogantia est, ’

as has been said in not the sweetest Latin that ever flowered.”

“ Your pardon, dear father,” replied Ralph. “ I am very ambitious ; not indeed of refuting the book of any author living or dead. That I leave to you, in every way fitted for the task, if falsehood be the opponent. But anxious am I—most anxious—‘ *ambire palmam* ’ on the great stage of human life. To speak straightforwardly, I have been thinking for some time of asking

your permission to go forth and try my fortune on a wider stage. I think I have not done ill at Cambridge ;" (the father nodded his head approvingly) ; "but yet none of the paths which a collegiate life opens to a man have temptations for me, and I would fain see whether I cannot carve out one for myself."

"What, at the court ?" asked the father, shaking his head. "Ralph, Ralph! you forget the means, and know not half the expenses, which a court life requires, even before the slightest advantage can be gained. With the rich and the courtly only, the rich and the courtly find favour. *Sus sui, canis cani, bos bovi, et asinus asino, pulcherrimus videtur.*"

"Oh, no!" cried Ralph, "no courtly life for me, sir. I may need some powerful friends ; but those I know you can procure me ; for not only they who are connected with you by blood, but they also who have had the stronger bond of personal friendship with you in former years, will assuredly

value your recommendation too highly to slight your son. As to means, the small sum I receive from my college, and a part of what you were kind enough to allow me there, will be ample."

His father shook his head with a somewhat doubtful air, and said—


"But if you should fail, Ralph?"

"I can but return here," replied the young man; "and matters will be just where they were before."

"You are fond of that phrase, Ralph," rejoined his father; "but you are mistaken; all are mistaken who use it. Nothing that has passed through any change, is ever the same as it was before. There is always something gained or something lost. It will be so with you; and who shall say, in all the various complexities of circumstance and character, of accident and conduct, which life in the great world implies, how the balance may incline when you visit this old dwelling again?"

.. He fell into deep thought after uttering

the last words. His son would not disturb his reverie; for the ice was broken, the first announcement made; and he was very certain of gaining his point in the end. Oh how eagerly did the youth long for the attainment of that point! What was it that attracted him so strongly? No truant disposition; no idle weariness of the spot where his ancestors had dwelt; no gilded dream of sport and pleasure; no over-coloured picture of the world's brightness. But it offered him hope: one small spark of that sacred fire, the extinction of which is death. He felt within him strong energies; he had proved somewhat severely his own abilities; he had a great purpose before him, a strong passion to lead him; and he wanted hope and opportunity for its fulfilment. He dared not tell his father all that was in his heart; for age is surrounded by a cold mist, in which the flame of hope will hardly burn; and if prescience were equal to experience, youth would never struggle on so far, and over-



come so much, for want of sunshine on the way.


The father sat gazing thoughtfully into the fire : the son remained with his head leaning on his hand, till both started at a sharp rap upon the door of the house from the heavy iron knocker which I have mentioned.

There was in truth no need of starting ; for both knew they were to have a visitor that night, to taste a bowl of punch, and chat over the affairs of the neighbouring country. But they had been so deeply involved in personal feelings, that they had forgotten the flight of time, and the guest was upon them before either was aware that the usual hour of his visit on a Wednesday night was actually come.

The father buttoned up a portion of his waistcoat, and drew on again a slipper, which, under the pressure of cogitation, he had kicked off his foot ; and the son put straight several of the chairs which, somehow or other, had got into a state of con-

fusion. In the meanwhile was heard a sound, such as might have proceeded from a seal newly caught, scrambling about in the bottom of a boat, but which, in reality, was caused by the movement through the passage of a short fin-legged maid-servant, eager to open the door, without delay, to his reverence the parson, of whose weekly visitation, she had been more mindful than her masters. Hardly two minutes elapsed after the stroke upon the outer door, when that of the little library opened, and two visitors presented themselves, instead of one, both bedecked with cassocks.

I cannot but regret the rubbing of the face off the coin, wherever I see it in society. I love local colour—I love class costume, though not class interests, however they may be disguised. Every profession—every calling, honorably exercised—is honorable; and nothing is so vain as the vanity—nothing so pitiful as the pride—which would conceal any external indication of a position we have no right to be ashamed



of occupying. The Norman peasant-girl, in love with her immemorial white cap, would feel herself degraded were you to dress her head up in hat and feathers. The New-Haven fish-wife has an honest pride in her yellow petticoat. The doctor in former times could be known by red roquelaure and gold-headed cane; the divine by the garments of his order. The soldier aped not the civilian, nor the civilian the soldier: each ship carried its own colours, and could be known by all who sailed past it. I see not the inconveniences of the system, though such are alleged in justification of the change made in our day. However, in the times of which I write, every parson could be known by his clerical garments; and both the gentlemen who now entered were evidently churchmen, though very different in appearance and demeanour from each other.

The first was a fat, rosy personage, in a bran-new cassock, glossy and black as a raven's wing. In personal appearance, he

was no mean representative of the old friar, wanting, however, the shaven crown and the bare feet. The glance he gave round the room had just such a degree of strangeness in it as might imply that he was not a frequent visitor there, though not altogether unknown.

The second was an older man—perhaps sixty years of age—tall, pale, and thin, with garments well worn, yet whole and decent. His hands, though they not unfrequently held the spade in his own garden, were peculiarly fine and delicate ; and his face had seemingly been very handsome in early life.

Now, from the time of the suppression of monasteries, and the reformation of the Church of England, under Henry VIII. (if reformation that movement could be called which took place under the wife-slayer), to the present day, some five or six complete revolutions have occurred in the state and character of the clergy of Great Britain. Those are now living who remember one or

two. By a very natural re-action, the fishing, and shooting, and hunting parson of the early part of the nineteenth century, the man unmindful of all outward observances, and very little careful of even the more solemn duties of his calling, has given place either to the man of forms and ceremonies—of surplices and genuflexions—of crosses and candlesticks—or to the eager, laborious, anxious, evangelical minister, ever visiting the sick, attending to the school, or frightening the wicked with vivid pictures of damnation, and diversifying labours, almost too much in themselves for any one man, with missionary meetings, propagation of gospel societies, and tract and Bible distribution. The parson Trulliber, (I know not if I spell the name rightly, as I have no book with me), the parson Adams, the Vicar of Wakefield—although each were certainly very much overdrawn, if we consider them as representatives of a class—give us some idea of the various phases of the clerical state in the

last century ; and innumerable memoirs, histories, and essays, show the real condition of the clergy in the end of the seventeenth, and beginning of the eighteenth, centuries.

At all these periods, be it, however, remembered, there was amongst the clergy of the day an infinite difference, in manners, character, and condition—between different individuals according to circumstances. The man placed at a distance from refined society in some remote country parish, was apt to lose the more polished manners acquired at college. This was especially the case where, as sometimes happened, the shameful smallness of the stipend compelled the parish priest or curate to eke out the means of subsistence by hard, manual labour. But, even then, it was not always the case ; and hands that have held the plough, or dug the glebe, have often, when washed and clean, during the evening hours, penned words of fire which have not only found their way to the hearts of men, kindling a flame

of pure religion in the breast, but have lighted the writer himself on the road to high preferment.

Again, the chaplain of the nobleman, or great landed proprietor, depending upon his patron for advancement in the church, and sometimes even for his dinner, was often inclined to be subservient and lick-spittle, to undertake degrading and sometimes shameless offices, to forget the dignity of his calling and the dignity of man. But this was merely occasionally ; and occasionally also you would find a chaplain as stern and harsh as the most fierce reformer, keeping the whole household in awe and even reproving the faults of his lord himself. These, however, were the extremes, and the general course lay between. There you would find the domestic priest, plodding on quietly in his duties, doing as much good as a not very zealous character could accomplish, bearing the crosses of his situation meekly, and looking forward

to a better and a freer day, when the long-expected living should be bestowed.

All the coarse caricature-daubing in the world cannot alter the lines of the picture left to us by the authentic records of those days ; and, though it may make the idle smile and the ignorant applaud, yet it will not deceive those who are really conversant with the manners and customs of other times.

Two clergymen of the seventeenth century are now before us, reader ; but they belong to neither extreme ; and the difference between them, though very great, only serves to show that even the middle ground admitted of much variety.

The first who entered advanced, after a momentary look around him, directly towards the master of the house, and took him by the hand with kindly warmth.

“ Mr. Woodhall,” he said, with the slightest possible touch on an Irish accent, “ I am delighted to see you again. It is

full six months since we last met ; for I stayed behind my Lord, being obliged to remain in London on account of having to go to Dublin about some little affairs of my own, my dear aunt having at length thought fit to take her departure for the realms of bliss, when, faith, I thought she had put off the journey altogether. She left me—God bless her !—a neat little comfortable income of two hundred pounds English, a large China bowl, and a pair of Tangier slippers. Heaven reward her ! as I am sure it should, for she never troubled it, till she could not help it.”

“I am glad to see you back, Mr. Mac Feely,” observed the master of the Grange ; “you have been much wanted to bless the venison up at the house.”

“Oh, the currant jelly does that mighty well without me,” replied the chaplain. “Mr. Ralph, I am right glad to see you. *Alma Mater* abandoned I hear. Done with the old lady, eh ? Well, it must be so with all fathers and mothers. Children

will quit them, must quit them ; and there is no use of going cackling about like a hen after a brood of young ducklings when first she sees them take to the water. Every animal knows its own element, and will find it sooner or later. My poor mother—rest her soul!—was sadly afraid that I might fall into the errors of Popery, and yield to the seductions of the scarlet woman ; but, faith, I had no turn for vows of celibacy, and so I came over to England to be out of harm's way. No, no ; wedlock is an honourable estate—especially when there is another estate to back it ; and as to being married to the church, upon my soul and conscience, I never yet saw the church, be it stone or wood, that I would like to marry anyhow.”

While this part of the worthy gentleman's discourse was going on, addressed to the son, the father had been welcoming his other guest, the parson of the parish.

“ Good evening, Doctor, give you good evening,” he said. “ You have caught me here, the ‘lean and slippered pantaloons ;’ but, good faith, Ralph and I were so earnest in talk that I forgot how time went. Nevertheless, ’tis well as it is. Conversation never walks so much at ease as when slipshod ; and we will scant ceremony to-night. Come, lay aside your periwig, and we will have a bowl of punch anon.”

Let us pass over the brewing of the punch, and the conversation which sweetened it, whether that conversation turned upon the decline of lemons, which the chaplain declared were not half as juicy as when he was a boy, or upon the enormous price of sugar, which the good parson mourned over sincerely. After the two first ladlefuls had passed round, however, other more important topics were started : rumours from London, tales from France, an epigram, a court ball, a passage of Lucan, and a newly-discovered method of solving some very puzzled questions connected with

conic sections, were all mentioned and discussed.

Ralph Woodhall had no interest in any of these things. Of some he was ignorant, of some he was tired ; and, at length, he rose, saying he would go out and take a walk for half an hour.

"To study the stars, Ralph?" asked his father.

"Nay, to write a sonnet to the pale-faced moon," replied his son, laughing ; and away he went.

"The boy has lost his wits," said the Irish clergyman, "to leave such a bowl as this, and such edifying conversation for a green lane and a moonbeam. He must be melancholic."

"Indeed he has been somewhat heavy and thoughtful of late," said the father ; "but he always loved these rural walks, *visere sæpe amnes nitidos.*"

"But not by darkness," observed the elder arson ; "he was never a night-walker."

"The lad's in love," exclaimed the Irish-

man ; " that is the plain truth, as sure as my name is Mac Feely. You never see a lad of about twenty get moping and walking by moonlight, looking into babbling brooks, or sitting with his hat off under an elm tree, but you may be sure that he is infected with that sauntering, heighô, lamentable idleness, love, rightly called a passion, if passion means suffering ; and as rightly called a madness or a disease by some doctors, whether the seat thereof be in the liver, or the midriff, or the brain, or the heart."

" Hold, hold, Doctor !" interrupted Mr. Woodhall ; " pray make some distinctions. There are various kinds of love : some honest, noble, ennobling ; others, evil and degrading. To say nothing of divine love, holy love, and all kinds and descriptions of honest affection, even the love of man for woman is often too pleasing and blessing to be called a disease. It may, perhaps, be termed a sort of mental titillation, which,

when not extravagant or in excess. is agreeable and even salutary. Many eastern nations take the greatest delight in being gently tickled; the Chinese enjoy having the soles of their feet titillated either with the finger or a feather; and yet we know that, carried to excess, the tickling of the feet has produced convulsion and death. All depends upon moderation; every excess is evil on whichever side it be committed: nay, I hold that an excess of abstinence is more sinful than an excess of indulgence; for the one is a despising of God's good gifts, while the other is merely a superfluous enjoyment of them. I cannot but think that the saint who stood on a pillar, and the anchorites of the Thebaid, were not only great fools but blasphemous fools; for, if they did not convey by speech, they signified by action, a foul and false imputation upon the character of the Deity, for which they deserve to be burned, if ever any men did merit such a fate."

"But if your son be in love, who is the person with whom he is in love?" asked the elder parson. "There is no one in the parish for whom I think it at all likely he should conceive such a passion."

"He is not in love at all," replied the father. "The truth is, my reverend friend, he has conceived a strong desire to go forth and seek his fortune in the world, and we were speaking of that very subject when you came in. I had neither consented nor prohibited; and, probably, doubt—the most painful of all moods or conditions of the mind—has made him wander forth to-night."

"The boy's in love!" grumbled Mr. Mac Feely, authoritatively; "the boy's in love! But as to sending him forth to seek his fortune, that is the very best thing that can be done for him. It is the best remedy in the world for love. He'll puff and sigh, like an angry cat, for the first fortnight. Then he'll find there is something else to be done in life than sigh."

Then he'll struggle on, 'all for the loved one's sake.' Then he'll forget the loved one in the struggle. Then he'll find, she has forgotten him ; and he'll console himself by saying—'There are more fish in the sea!' Bless your soul, Mr. Woodhall, when I left Ireland with what I could scrape together to study at your University of Oxford here, I was dying for love of no less than nine of the prettiest girls in all the North of Ireland. Not one of them that didn't swear she would die a maid for my sake ; and yet you see *I* am a bachelor over forty, and *they* are all matrons—some of them grandmothers, I fancy."

"What do you say to it, my worthy friend, Barry?" asked Mr. Woodhall, addressing the other parson. "I do not like to part with my son so soon after his return from College. I do not wish to throw a lad like that upon the wide world without any decided prospect before him. Yet, if it be for his good, I will cast away

parental fondness and parental anxiety, and let him go."

"You will let him go in the end; Woodhall, whatever you determine now," replied the clergyman, with a look of kindly meaning; "and it is better to do that graciously which you will do eventually. Besides, I think you will do right. The most important part of education is the education of the world. Those who keep their children back from this till they are themselves gone, leave them to receive the hard instruction without any one at hand to render it more easy. You have given Ralph every preparation. His mind and his heart have been cultivated highly. Let him go to receive the lessons of experience, while you are still here to give aid in case of need."

"Well, he shall go," said Mr. Woodhall, with a sigh. "I have still some friends left in the great world who will lend a helping hand; and to them he shall have letters."

"I have but one," said Mr. Barry; "but

he is a good and faithful one ; and Ralph must know him."

"Bless your soul, I will get him twenty letters from my lord in a jiffy," exclaimed Mr. Mac Feely. "The lad is a great favorite of his; and I have nothing to do but to write them, and my lord will sign and address them."

Thus was it determined that Ralph Woodhall should go forth to try the world.

CHAPTER IV.

I MENTIONED the stream—surely I mentioned the stream. Yes, I certainly did, although, in the hurry of telling a story, one is sometimes apt to forget small particulars. But I know I informed the reader, in describing the Grange, that a small pleasant stream, not unconscious of trout, wandered past the back of the old house, and then, as if it had a peculiar affection for the place, made a graceful turn round one of the sides, serving for a fence—even if a dilapidated old wall had not been there for that purpose.

It was a very beautiful little river—for it deserved a grander name than rivulet,

seeing it was at that spot some twelve or fourteen feet broad ; and although the country to the north and east was flat, yet a number of little hills and eminences, and a general sloping tendency of the country to the south and west, from which it descended, had contrived to give it a swift and hurried motion, which was accelerated by several miniature cascades and rapids. Trees were growing by its side, and often overhanging it, canoping its glistening waters with interlacing boughs and green, shimmering foliage. Sometimes they swept afar, leaving broad open meadows, where the angler might throw his fly with fearless sweep of arm ; but sometimes they crept close to the banks—so close that their green-brown, rounded roots would obtrude from the rugged bank, mingling with the mossy turf and oozy rock, and curl down into the stream with many a twist, and many an aperture, affording fit concealment for the hole of the water rat or otter.


On the left hand bank, however, whether

along green meadow or amongst the dim shrubbery-trees, close to the margin of the stream, and following all its turns and windings, ran a broad, dry, well-kept path ; and as beautiful and pleasant a walk it furnished, for any one who loved quiet musing or was studious of the tranquil face of Nature, as could well be found in the wide world. The very bounding, rash, garrulous boyhood of the stream, as it darted on, struggling with the rocks and impediments in its way, overleaping some difficulties, rushing round other obstacles, and still, in spite of all, making its way onward, might furnish fancies to a poet and thoughts to a philosopher.

Then the view over some of the open fields, often indeed broken by hedges, rows, and dotted with church spire, and cottage, and farm house, but not unfrequently extending for miles and miles away over blue fen and dusky moor, had something wide and expansive in it, which seemed to open the heart and make the

breast heave more freely. Where the trees fringed the stream, the eye could still wander far ; for there was no thick wood, but a mere belt of planting without undergrowth, leaving smooth banks and grassy slopes between the old trunks and stems, over which the sight might range along tracks of sunshine, and often catch a glimpse, through the green avenues, of a far extending distance beyond.

Oh the homilies of Nature! how they pour into the heart of those who will hear them, lessons of peace, tranquillity, and love, which might well reform this harsh and jarring world, if man would but study them! The characters which man's hand traces, even if spared by the wearing course of time, whether written on parchment or graven upon the rock, pass from comprehension—become a riddle or a mystery. The learned scrutinise, the bold or the wise interpret; but the interpretation is denied, and the dead man's tongue becomes a matter of dispute and contention to the living. Yet the wisdom of the page ever



open before our eyes, is written in the universal language ; and man has but to look and read, to find himself wiser, better, greater, from the permitted communion with a spirit above his own.

A fair and pleasant walk was this path beside the stream : pleasant in the early morning, when dew was upon grass and flower, and the slant rays peeped under the green branches, as if the first glance of the day at the new world was timid and doubtful ; pleasant at noon, when the green boughs afforded shade, and the brief walk across the meadow rendered the shade more grateful and the fresh air from the ever-moving stream more sweet ; pleasant at evening, when the rosy light tintured leaf and moss and blade of grass, and painted the old trunks of trees, and sprinkled the foam with rubies. Pleasant also was it, most pleasant, when the yellow moon was hanging high in air, and her beams, weaving themselves with the shadowy branches, spread the way with a net-work of black and silver. Then, how

the stream would seem to dance, and gambol, and leap up, as if to meet the looks of the queen of night ; and how every little cascade and rapid would sport with the shower of diamonds that fell upon it from on high !

Along that path, under the moonbeam, Ralph Woodhall took his way, with slow and thoughtful step, while the next step in his future course was under discussion in his father's house. He paused at the first meadow, and looked up to the broad moon ; and then moved on again, sometimes gazing on the stream, and drawing dreamy images from its flashing waters, sometimes fixing his eyes on the path, and giving up his whole mind to communion with his own thoughts. They were somewhat sad and dark—at least, the ground-work was so ; but still a gleam of hope stole through, and chequered the gloom of the untried future.

Onward he went, for about half-a-mile. There the stream approached the little village, yet came not too near ; but, sweeping past the foot of the little rise on

which it stood, left a single field dotted with one clump of trees between its bank and the first house. Ralph paused there, and looked up at the church ; and strange fancies passed through his mind. They were like those embodied in Schiller's Song of the Bell—full of association, partly sad, partly joyful. Oh, how many a scene, and himself an actor in them all, passed pageant-like before his eyes, during the brief moment that he spent there : all life's great epochs—all their emblems ; the cradle—the bridal ring—the coffin !

He walked on, musing, till he came to a low wall, with a stile of hewn stone, and thick trees beyond ; and, passing over, he followed the path still running by the side of the stream. Through the trees, the moon-light could be seen resting upon open, ferny ground, with many a dell and glade, and, here and there, a deer lifting up its antlered head at the sound of a footfall.

Presently, another sort of light gleamed

between the branches, though more directly on his path—a redder and less placid beam ; and shortly after, a tall, irregular house was seen upon a terrace, to the foot of which the path approached very close, with a bright blaze coming forth from the casements on the lower story, while a ray or two shone out from the lattices above.

The young man took a step or two aside to a spot where the trees approached nearest to the house, but remained under their shade, and gazed up at one particular casement, with a look intent, but sorrowful.

What might be his thoughts and feelings at that moment ? What might they *not* be ? The ringing sound of merry laughter came from the fully-lighted windows below. Men were there, carousing jovially ; but their merriment had no music for his ear. Did he envy them ? Oh no ! Perhaps he might think how strangely Fate shaped men's lots : perhaps he might ask why he, in whose veins flowed the same blood as some of those rejoicing there within—who


was conscious of as high a mind, as bold and true a heart—should be placed in comparative poverty, should be looked upon as in an inferior position, because his father's great grandfather, about a couple of centuries before, had chanced, without his own consent, to be born a younger son. Yet he envied them not ; he coveted not aught that they possessed : nay, of all within those walls, he longed for but one thing. But for that, how he did long ! He could not obtain it : and yet the only bar was the lack of that which those revellers possessed. That thought added to the objects of desire ; but their wealth, their rank, their station, were only coveted as means—means to the great end and object of all his heart's desire.

Thoughts came in crowds ; but still he fixed his eyes upon that lattice. A shadow crossed it ; and he said to himself, “ She knows not I am gazing here.” Then again, he murmured with some bitterness, “ If she did, what would she care ?” But the

next moment he added, " Yet I wrong her. She would care—she would grieve—perhaps, she would come forth to cheer me—at all events, to bid me farewell. Would I could let her know !"

He was taking a step forward with some unfixed purpose in his mind, when a small door at the side of the building, not far from the bright casements, emitted a momentary light which was instantly obscured again. The next moment, a figure—a woman's figure—passed along the terrace, crossing the blaze from the hall, and Ralph advanced a step or two. But he retreated as rapidly ; for the figure turned suddenly from the sound of the revelry, descended the steps of the terrace, and approached the very path by which he had come.

Oh ! how his heart beat at that moment ! Hers, perhaps, might have throbbed as wildly, had she known who was near. But the night was perfectly still, though somewhat hazy, and she took her way on,



paused for an instant to look up at the sky where the moonbeams veiled the stars, and then entered the path beneath the overhanging boughs. Ralph Woodhall took a step forward : it fell on some of the withered leaves of the last year, and the sound startled her. She stopped suddenly ; and, fearful that she would turn and fly, he pronounced her name.

“ Margaret !” he said, “ Margaret ! Don’t be afraid. It is Ralph. I am glad you have come out ; for they seem merry-making at the hall, and I did not like to go in, though I longed to see you.”

Margaret gave him her hand. Whose heart was beating then ?

“ They are making a terrible noise,” she replied ; “ more than usual, I think, though ; perhaps, it may be that my head aches, and that makes their mirth sound louder than at other times. I fancied that the cool air would do me good, and therefore came out to stroll along by the stream.”

"I will guard you on your walk, Margaret," said Ralph; "it may be the last time I can do so for several years to come."

"The last time!" echoed the young girl; for she could not be more than seventeen or eighteen. "You are not going to leave us, Ralph?"

"Yes, indeed, for a time, dear Margaret," he replied. "I am going away into the wide world to seek my fortune. At least, I have asked my father's leave to do so."

"Fortune!" ejaculated Margaret, in a musing tone, walking slowly along the path; "what can there be in fortune, that men sacrifice so much in seeking it?"

"Nothing in itself," responded Ralph, "but everything as a means—to me, at least, everything."

"I see not why it should be more to you than to others," observed Margaret. "Why is it?"

"I will tell you in an instant," replied

her companion. "Here I am hardly at home from college, when I wish to go away again—to part from my father, and you, and all my friends. That is what you would say, I know, dear Margaret. But if I stay at home, content with the little that fate has given me, without an effort to make it more, or to win honour and station and renown, a still bitterer parting must come : I must see the one I love best in the world leave me for another home ; not only deny me her presence, but deny me her thoughts—bestow heart and hand upon another, and be to me almost as a stranger."

Margaret trembled, but answered nothing ; and Ralph went on. "Shall I wait tamely, Margaret, and, without an effort, see all this come rapidly ? or shall I, with a strong heart, battle with fortune, and try to conquer it, for the hope of her I love ?"

"Oh, yes, go, go !" cried the girl, eagerly.

"I may not succeed, perhaps," continued Ralph ; "all my efforts may fail—it is very likely. I may have to endure the same pang, to undergo the same loss, notwithstanding the utmost exertion. That is in God's hand ; but at all events I shall have one consolation. I shall have striven, I shall have laboured, I shall have done my part ; and you, Margaret, you will think better of me ; you will remember me and my disappointment with sorrow ; you will pity, if you must not love, me."

"I shall always love you, Ralph," she replied, in perfect simplicity ; but then suddenly stopped, adding with a deep sigh, "I speak foolishly, I fear ; but you will not misunderstand me."


"Margaret," he rejoined, in a tone of deep feeling, "Margaret, we must fully understand each other. I love you, Margaret ; I shall always love you ; I shall never love any but you. Yet hear me, dear girl, and do not tremble so," he continued, drawing her arm within his. "I seek

to bind you by no tie to one in whose dark fortunes it needs the eye of eager love to see a single spark of hope. I ask of you no promise to be mine, for I know right well that, in my present state, it were utter madness for either you or me to dream of such a far off bliss. I have that madness, Margaret, for I still dare to hope ; but I would not have you share it, lest my own bitter disappointment should be doubled by breaking your heart too. It is well for me to go, and leave you free to act as your own feelings may dictate, or circumstances may impel. It is well for me to go, and seek with the energy which only love can give, for all those bright jewels of the world which are but too estimable in the eyes of those in whose hands your destiny must lie. So long as you are Margaret Woodhall, hope will live, exertion will continue, and strength will be given me to struggle on ; but should I ever hear of you by another name, the light of life will have

gone out, and, as my father has done, I shall sit down to fade in darkness."

"What shall I do? What shall I say?" murmured Margaret, as if speaking to herself. "Oh, Ralph! if I could add to your hopes—if I could strengthen your efforts—how gladly would I do it! But my fate is in the hands of others. I have no right to promise anything. And yet a promise might strengthen me myself; it might give me vigour to resist, should resistance be needful. Still my father has been very kind to me and to you. Ought we, Ralph, ought we, to do or say anything that he would blame and condemn?"

"No! oh, no!" answered Ralph Woodhall, firmly. "I ask it not, Margaret. I only ask, let me still hope. Keep your heart and hand for me as long as may be; and, though it may seem wild, rash, insane, to dream that in a few short years I may accomplish enough to lessen the disparity between your state and mine, yet, so long



as the beacon burns before me, I will go on, let the road be ever so rough and perilous. These are strange and stirring times, Margaret. Changes come suddenly and often ; all men are struggling ; let me struggle too ; and if Margaret will but bid me hope, my heart shall never fail."

Margaret laid her fair hand upon his, and, looking up in his face, replied, "Hope, Ralph, hope! Hope all—hope always! I, too, will hope and struggle."

As she spoke, the moonlight poured through the branches on her face, and lighted her beautiful eyes. The look and the words were too much to be resisted. Ralph bent his head over her, and their lips met.


"Hark!" exclaimed Ralph, after a moment's trembling pause. "I hear footsteps coming up the path. Let us turn back towards the hall."

"Yes, yes, let us turn back," said Margaret, unclasping his arms from around her, yet gently, kindly ; and then, as if she

would not leave him wholly comfortless, she added, in a low voice, as they walked onward, "There is, at least, one thing I may promise, Ralph. I will not plight my faith to another : I will not yield to any intreaty—nay, or command—till I have given you notice, and allowed time sufficient for you to come and deliver me from that which would be worse a thousand fold than death, if deliver me you can. But now let us be calm, for I hear the steps coming quickly behind us."

When those steps approached nearer still, Margaret was more composed than her lover ; for such is woman's nature. Perhaps he had been less deeply moved than she—he could not be more ; but the stronger spirit, like the deeper water, when once in motion remains longer agitated.

"Ah, ha, Mister Ralph!" ejaculated the voice of Dr. Mac Feely behind them, a moment after. "Upon my life and soul! this is my country's way of taking a *solitary* ramble. You go out to walk alone



with a companion, eh ? Why, fair Mistress Margaret, does my lord know of your night-roaming ?”

“ Quite well,” replied Margaret, with very little sign of emotion. “ I frequently walk through the park in the moonlight, Doctor ; but do not often have such good luck as to-night in meeting Ralph to keep me company. Ralph loves books better than the moon, I fancy.”

“ He loves a pretty face wherever he can find it, I imagine, be it the moon’s or not,” returned the chaplain.

“ As to my solitary ramble, Doctor,” observed Ralph, “ I believed, when I set out, it would be solitary enough ; but I cannot say it has been less unpleasant for not being so.”

“ Ay, devil doubt you,” muttered Mac Feely to himself ; “ but moonlight walks are pretty dangerous things, as I know to my cost. There was the widow Macarthy—but no matter for that. The moon is considered a cold planet ; but, on

my faith, I think she has a greater knack of scorching than any sun I ever saw."

All this was uttered in an under tone, so that no distinct sense was conveyed to the two by whose side the chaplain now walked. It was evident, however, that his suspicions were excited ; and Ralph, somewhat impetuous in disposition, and ever ready to confront a danger, asked, boldly,

"What are you talking to yourself about, Doctor ?"

"Oh, nothing at all, but some of the queer freaks of Nature, my boy," replied the other ; and Margaret interposed, saying,

"Ralph has been telling me of a queer. freak of his, Doctor. He says he is going to travel, and leave us all here in this dull place. He has not been home from College a month, and is weary of us already. Cannot you persuade him to stay a little if but for civility's sake ?"

"By my conscience, but that is the last thing I shall do," returned Dr. Mac Feely.

"It is the best thing for him to go and see the world, and may be just as well for other people too. No, no; I have promised the old gentleman to get my Lord, your father, to give him letters to all the great folks he knows, who may help him on in life; and the sooner they are given the better."


"Well, I do not know what I shall do when he is gone," said Margaret, following unconsciously a policy almost instinctive in woman's heart, and showing a portion in order to conceal the whole. "I shall have no one to talk to but you, Doctor; and no one to draw me out of the river if I fall in, as Ralph did when I was a little girl; for you would never wet your cossack for my sake."

"Would'nt I though, darling?" cried the jolly priest. "I can help you at a pinch, and will, depend upon it; and as to conversation, mine will do you a world more good than that of any young scape-grace in the land. But now, as to asking

my Lord about these letters—can it be done to-night? Is he in a fit state to be talked to, Mistress Margaret? There was an army of bottles on the table when I left, and the Bordeaux was none of the worse.”

“Fit to be talked to!” echoed Margaret. “Fie, Doctor! to be sure he is. Would you have me tell papa that you think he gets tipsy every night?”

“No, no! For Heaven’s sake not such a word, or there goes the living!” cried Dr. Mac Feely. Oh you little fox, so you have turned the tables upon me! Well, you shall see how discreet I can be, and you be discreet also, and don’t say a word. We’ll keep one another’s counsel; and mind, my darling, when you have an opportunity, speak a good word for me about the living. I have been ten years in the house—ever since you were a little thing not up to my knee—and not a benefice has been offered me, but that horrid marshy hole of Agueborough-cum-Slush-



ing-Gap, where I should have had to read prayers to yellow-bellied frogs, and preach to the sea mews. I shall never be a Bishop at this rate ; and I am resolved to comfort my arms in lawn, if it be possible. But now we are coming near. You trot up to your own room, Mistress Margaret ; and I and Ralph will go in. Then the old Lord will never be a bit the wiser as to your moonlight rambles."

"On the contrary, I shall go straight in," observed Margaret, boldly ; "that is to say, if all those sots are gone ; and will ask my father for the letters for Ralph myself. You are altogether mistaken, my reverend friend, if you suppose that I care about my father knowing where I have been, or that I met Ralph accidentally. Only take care not to put any wrong construction upon my walk, Doctor," she added in a warning tone ; "for the plain truth, I fear not."

When they reached the house, however, it was found that the party in the

hall had not yet broken up ; and the sounds that issued forth warned Margaret that it was no scene for her to appear in. Doctor Mac Feely judged also that his presence would not be acceptable ; and the three parted at the door.

It cannot be said that Ralph's fingers did not press more warmly on Margaret's hand than on that of the chaplain, as he bade them severally adieu.

CHAPTER V.

IT was too much for the warmth of those lovers' hearts to part in the cold, frozen solitude of even the little world around them. The many make a solitude for the few. No prison walls are harder, sterner—no fetters more rigid, more binding—no penitentiary cell more silent, more solitary, than the wall of hard human faces, than the fetters of conventional forms, than the dull, hemming-in, unresponsive circle of an unsympathising crowd, for hearts that feel together, and would speak to the ears that can comprehend.

They could not bear it: they risked all, for the sake of pouring out the thoughts

of each bosom to the other, and met on one bright morning, the day before Ralph's departure over the brown heaths and moors. Heaven knows how they found the opportunity ! They hardly knew themselves. It was the impulse of the moment ; fortune favored them ; the skies winked at the lovers' wish, and there they were. No eye, it would seem, perceived their going forth : none, whom they knew, met them in the lonely lane ; and, once on the wild commons, they were but a speck upon the wide extent.

They heard the cry of dogs afar. They saw hounds and mounted horsemen sweep over the distant hill, but they felt little alarm ; for so broad was the expanse, that it would have required long calculation to discover how many chances there were to one, that the hunt would not come within seeing distance of themselves. Sometimes they walked on together ; sometimes they sat side by side on the dry, sandy bank. Margaret's hand rested in

that of Ralph, and their eyes looked into each other's.


"You will not forget me, Margaret, amongst all the gay and proud and high who throng your father's dwelling?"

"Can I forget myself, Ralph, and all the memories of which my existence is made up? But will *you* not forget *me*? You are going forth from me into a giddy world, where all is new and untried to you; where thousands of sights, and feelings, and hopes, and passions, and efforts, and changes, may well wipe away Margaret's image from your heart."

"Do you believe it, Margaret? Do you think that, in aught I meet with, I shall ever forget for one moment the object of my going forth? What to me will be all that the world can give or show? Haughty grandeur—supple flattery—upstart wealth—official insolence—eager, hasty business—cunning policy and low cabal—lordly halls, and crowded courts, and glittering gems, and bitter strife,—none of these would in

the least affect me, without the hope—the one bright leading hope, which, like the mariners' star, may lead me away, only to guide me surely home again? Oh no! These things form but the waves of a sea through which my bark must steer; but, if they once break in, then I am wrecked indeed. Would, dear Margaret, while I am gone, that you could see every thought and feeling of my heart—behold, as in a glass, every act in which I am engaged!"

Margaret mused. "Would we could both know the future!" she exclaimed; "at least as far as our own fate is concerned. Would we could see how all this will end! They tell me a man lives yonder, down by those few scattered houses on the moor, who can read horoscopes, and tell, by various means, the destiny of those who will consult him freely. What think you, Ralph," she asked, with a laugh and a blush; "shall we go and ask him our fate? What if he were to say, you would prove untrue, and love some fair lady of the




court, and forget Margaret ? Are you afraid to enquire ?”

“Not in the least,” he replied ; “for I should give no weight to his words, Margaret, whatever he said. The stars tell us of God’s might, and everything throughout Nature tells His love and bounty ; but man’s fate is a sealed book, which no stars, nor aught else in the great creation, can aid us in reading. Had the Almighty ever designed that the destiny even of the next coming hour should be known to us, he would have given us clear means of learning it ; for the same Being who has taught us all that is necessary we should know to aid us in our conduct here, and ensure our salvation hereafter, would not have left us ignorant of anything that could be beneficial to us to comprehend in our worldly destiny. However, I have no fear ; so let us go.”

It may be a question whether Ralph really felt the full amount of scepticism in regard to arts which obtained almost uni-

versal credence in those days. Reason is a fine thing ; but, alas for poor human nature ! reason but too often fails to convince. There would seem to be intuitive convictions, against which argument, the most logical, fails to operate. Ralph had a thousand times pondered and discussed with himself all the points of superstition that affected the age in which he lived. He had proved to his own satisfaction that the calculations of the astrologer, and all the terrors of supernatural visitants, were either impostures or dreams. To his own satisfaction, I have said, but not to his own conviction ; and the two are very distinct. He did not, however, suffer the lingering feelings of unwilling belief in that which his reason rejected, to affect him in his conduct ; and he again expressed his willingness to go.

Margaret, on the other hand, had never argued the question with herself at all. Not that she gave full credence to all the wilder and grosser superstitions of the day ; for a




mind naturally strong and bright, had guarded her against much, though not against all. She had heard, with horror and indignation, of the trial, condemnation, and execution of some unfortunate persons for witchcraft not very long before the period of which I speak ; but yet, when we remember that Sir Thomas Brown himself, the great reformer of "vulgar errors," could not free his mind entirely from the superstitions of his day, it was not to be expected that a young girl of Margaret's age should be entirely devoid of them.

She went on, then, with her lover, feeling greater faith than he in the experiment they were about to make, and of course greater eagerness also. At the same time, her fears and agitation were greater likewise ; and, before they had taken a hundred steps, she almost regretted having made the proposal. Curiosity, however, was stronger than apprehension ; perhaps I might say, hope was stronger ; for undoubtedly one great motive of the enquiry

she was about to make, was to strengthen her own heart in the coming hours of trial, by the assurance of after happiness which she fondly trusted to receive.

The base of all superstition is awe at the thought of some great unknown thing; and whatever tends to impress the mind with grand and solemn fancies, naturally aids in that direction. I never saw the cause of superstitious fears, so universal in the mind of man, clearly and rightly reasoned but once; and that was in the work of an American writer less generally known, at least in England, than he ought to be. He makes one of his characters speak as follows: "Fear is not cowardice. You may encounter, unmoved, the greatest danger that can threaten you, as death in any shape, and yet be frightened at a trifle, merely because its exact magnitude is unknown to you. And this convinces me that there is something somewhere in the universe, more terrible than death, or any ill that we know



of ; or whence comes this all-pervading instinct of fear, which begins in the cradle and follows to the grave ? There is some undeveloped cause of fear somewhere ; some terrible evil which the imaginations of men have not been able to find a shape for."

Anything that strikes the mind, and produces sensations of awe, even of sublimity or grandeur, has a powerful effect in rousing all that is superstitious in our nature ; and the scene through which the two wandered, was well calculated to have that effect. I know nothing more solemn and impressive than a wide, far-extended, uncultivated moor, upon a dim day, when no bright gleams of sunshine diversify the expanse with patches of golden light ; when the sky above is all gray, and the eye rests upon nothing but long lines of brown and purple heath, like a broad, desolate ocean spreading every where around.

Such was the scene which presented itself to the eyes of Ralph and Margaret

before they had gone a quarter of a mile. The undulations of the ground had, by that time, hidden the ploughed fields and meadows around The Grange ; the hedge-rows and tall trees were no longer seen ; the church, and the village, and her father's Hall, were shut out from sight ; and the only part to be discerned of the higher country to the south and west was a dark green line of hill, covered with sombre wood. The small, scattered houses, towards which they wended their way, and which were to be seen distinctly when they stood on the upland, were now lost to the view ; and not a trace of man's habitation, or his industrious hand, greeted the eye to relieve the prospect from its air of utter desolation. Even the path—if path it could be called—which they followed to arrive at their object, shewed none of the rich colouring which could relieve the generally grave tints of the view ; but, being formed of the dark gray sand of a peaty soil, harmonized well with, but enlivened not at all, the



black and swampy ground on either side. Here and there a pool lay glistening upon the moor, though the effect was not cheerful ; for it reflected nothing but the gray sky above ; and round the edge, where the grass and heath had rotted under the action of the water, the black, tangled roots and dull brown moss, ragged and tufted, gave a more dreary look to the ground.

The distance was greater than Margaret had supposed ; for the cottagers, who were in reality intruders upon another man's land, had taken care to build at some distance from the cultivated ground ; not, indeed, in the hope of escaping observation, but in order to render it not worth while to dispossess them. The solitary man, too, who had established himself at no great distance from them, was not inclined to court the proximity of the gay, general world ; and he had planted his dwelling even some four or five hundred yards farther in the moor than the cottagers themselves.

Thus the walk was nearly two miles in length ; and the ever-recurring sameness of the view, its vastness, its desolation, sank more and more heavily upon Margaret's spirits, as she and her lover walked slowly on over the numerous slopes of the ground, where the prospect was only varied by a different arrangement of the same monotonous materials and hues ; and she literally trembled as she approached the lonely dwelling where she more than half believed her future fate might be made known to her.

The house itself was sad and solemn-looking ; not a mere clay hovel, like those that had been passed before, but a tall dwelling of rough stone, with a perpendicular row of four windows, and two low and narrow doors. It had evidently been built a long time ; for moss and lichen clung about it, and a thick stem of ivy rose at one corner, sending out its matted foliage of dark green over the greater part of two sides of the building.

It might have been a tower, erected in times of trouble for watching the fens; and, if a lodge in a garden of cucumbers afforded to the Hebrew prophet a good image of desolation, an Englishman could conceive no habitation much more gloomy and dreary than a solitary stone house in the midst of the marshes of Lincolnshire. In one respect, it had the advantage over the little hamlet situated near. It was placed upon the top of the highest elevation of the low grounds, (rising about twenty feet above the general level of the moor), probably, for the purpose of descrying afar off any object that moved across the fens. Consequently, the situation was drier, and more secure than could have been found any where else in the neighbourhood. But still it looked damp, and cold, and miserable enough.

At the door which the two young people approached, hung a large bell. Laying his hand upon the pulley, Ralph drew it


sharply down. It gave forth a dull, melancholy sound, which made Margaret start. No one, however, appeared at the door, although they waited several minutes in expectation. At the end of that time, Ralph rang again ; still no one appeared ; and, at length, he lifted the latch, and opened the door. As he did so, he saw the foot of a tall, stone stair-case before him, and, at the same moment, a loud, deep voice called from above—

“Come up !”

When the young man turned towards Margaret, he saw that her blooming cheek had become very pale, and that she was evidently much agitated.

“Shall we go on, dearest Margaret ?” he asked, taking her hand tenderly in his.

“Oh yes, yes, let us go on now,” replied Margaret, in a low voice. “Perhaps, if I had known I should be so frightened, I might not have asked this ; but I will not turn back now.”



"There is no occasion for alarm, dear girl," rejoined Ralph. "I will go first ; but let me have your hand, Margaret."

Thus, hand in hand, they ascended the long stair-case ; while the voice from above repeated, in a tone of command, the words—

"Come up !"

They passed two doors, one at the top of the first, and another at the top of the second, flight of steps ; but Ralph judged that the voice sounded from a place higher up still, and went on. The stair-case was very dark, illuminated only by a narrow loop-hole here and there ; but, in the middle of the third flight, a brighter gleam began to shine upon the steps, and Margaret detained her lover for a moment, to recover breath and courage, ejaculating—

"Stay a little, Ralph. Let me stop my heart from beating so." Then, after a short pause, she added—"Now let us go on ; I am ready"

CHAPTER VI.

AT the top of the stairs, was an open door, from which what light there was in the sky streamed out upon the landing-place, the old oaken bannister which guarded the descent, and upon one half of the flight of steps to the floor below. This light was so bright, so clear, compared with that upon the common, especially when separated from it by the darkness of the stair-case, that Margaret and Ralph both thought, for a moment, that the clouds had cleared away, and that the sunshine was streaming through some window which they could not see. Such is the common effect of



mounting to a high point, when the atmosphere is very thick; but these two young people had never experienced it before; and they were surprised when they found, on looking up, that, through what they termed a window in the roof—in other words a skylight—the sky appeared as gray and clouded as ever. Now these skylights are supposed by many to have been unknown at the period I speak of; and the vanity of modern discovery leads men to believe that many things are new inventions which were as well known to our ancestors as to ourselves. It is the general *introduction* of comforts and conveniences that is slow. The discovery of them is often made centuries before they are applied.

There was, then, a regular skylight, with a small portion giving light to the top steps, while the larger part served to illuminate the room beyond, the door of which was open.

The interior of the room was visible en-

tirely to the eyes of Margaret and Ralph as they ascended ; and very different was it from that of the learned Doctor Sidrophel, as described by Butler. The room was nearly destitute of furniture. There were two chairs and one table, formed of old, hard oak, upon which stood a telescope pointing towards the skylight I have mentioned. Beside it, lay many mathematical instruments, and a great number of pieces of paper, or card, on which were inscribed an infinite quantity of lines and figures, only understood by the initiated. Of stuffed beasts, the room was vacant : no skin of alligator or large lizard appeared ; but upon a board at the side, well scrawled with a piece of chalk, were innumerable inscriptions and strange figures, which Margaret did not at all comprehend.

Near the table—the only table which was to be seen—stood the master of the house, dressed in long, black garments, with boots of yellow morocco leather. In short, his whole costume was singular,

and at once denoted the profession of an astrologer. It was not gaudy, nor in bad taste. It seemed not as if he thought to proclaim his pretensions, but merely adopted a peculiar garb for his own convenience. His figure and appearance were impressive. He was a tall, powerful man, of more than six feet in height, and unbowed by the weight of years, although many must have rolled over that tall smooth brow, and the bald crown above. The hair on the temples and back of the head, was as white as the driven snow ; but the eye-brows were still black as night, and but few wrinkles appeared in the skin, which was as fair and smooth as that of any lady in the land.

At the moment the lovers approached the door of the room, the astrologer was looking anxiously at some papers in his hand, and seemed wholly engrossed by the subject of the moment. He moved not from the position in which he stood, but simply repeated, once or twice, the words, "Come up!" and

it was not until Margaret and Ralph had been some moments in the room that he moved his eyes to ascertain who were his visitors.

At length, he fixed a keen and eager glance upon them, and asked, in no very gentle tone, "What brings you here, young people? Come ye to seek information of the past, the present, or the future? I can tell you either, and *will* tell you; for I know you too well to fancy that it is some lost spoon, or strayed sheep, or any idle nothing of village life which brings you here, as so many are brought, to enquire of the *wise man*, whom they only think wise because he is different from themselves in their own foolishness."

He spoke in a somewhat sneering tone, and Ralph answered in a calm but yet a bold one.

"We have heard, sir," he said, "that you have studied deeply, sciences of which we know nothing; and that you are capable of giving us information—or at least believe

so—regarding our future fate. But you seem to know who and what we are already ; and now we desire to hear not what may be judged or fancied from the probabilities of our existing situation, but rather that which is indicated by science and calculation.”

“ You are a scholar, sir,” returned the astrologer, looking at him from head to foot ; “ and doubtless hold in contempt the things which other ages venerated. It is the mood of young scholars ; but it matters not. I *do* know you both well. I know you from the cradle, until now. The past, the present, the future, as it regards you, are all before me. I knew when you would come here, and that was why I told you to come up, though I am not willing to be interrupted in my studies at this hour. Now, Ralph Woodhall, what would you that I should tell you ? and you, Mistress Margaret, what is it you desire of me ? Would you fair dreams and specious promises, visions of bright and golden hap-

piness, love and enjoyment long life and a good old age ? You will have none such from me. Do you wish to hear the truth, or do you not ? Are you bold enough—fearless enough—to look upon the future with an unwinking eye, and shape your course accordingly ?”

“I am,” replied Margaret, in a firmer tone than might have been expected from her previous agitation. “It is for that I come. Say, Ralph, is it not better that we should know what is in store for us, than go on in doubt and uncertainty ?”

Ralph was silent. There was something so impressive in the old man’s manner, a strong conviction, so clear in his own mind, that some belief was compelled ; and yet the youth did not wish to acknowledge that he placed any reliance on the other’s pretended science. The pride of argument and reason was against it ; and he paused so long, that the other went on with a somewhat angry frown.

“ You are incredulous !” he said, “ or

would seem so. Happily for you, belief or unbelief cannot affect, to any extent, the immutable decree of fate. Now, mark me, I need not the day and hour of your birth. I know them both right well, and I will tell you broadly that which is coming. To you, lady, in the first place let me say the little I have to say. Be true : Be cautious: Persevere. Strive not in any degree to resist what seems impending over you. Yield to it, without a pledge ; but keep your troth pure and unsullied at the last, and you shall still be happy."

"But not without him," exclaimed Margaret, laying her hand upon Ralph's arm, and looking up in the old man's face eagerly ; "not without him, or it cannot be true happiness."

The cloud passed away from the old man's brow, and he looked at her with a smile the most sweet and benignant.

"Truth will always make happiness," he said ; "without truth, there can be none. You know how you are plighted to

each other. Be true to each other ; and you shall be happy. But it will not be without sorrow, and trial, and difficulty. Now to you, young gentleman, I will speak. You are full of vain hopes and expectations. Love makes you ambitious ; and I tell you, that you shall see one bright prospect fade away after another, and hopes extinguished as soon as they are born. You shall struggle on against hope, and meet with disappointment after disappointment. This is your course. Lo, I have told you !”

He paused for a moment, gazing fixedly upon the countenance of Ralph Woodhall, and then added in a lower tone—“ But persevere. Be true, and be happy in the end. In the moment when you least expect it—by the means you least foresaw—your fate shall be worked out, and your success accomplished. But hark ! Others are coming, who must not find you here. Get you into this other room. Keep as still as death, and wait till they are gone.”

Thus saying, he opened a door in the wainscot, disclosing a small chamber utterly without furniture, and with one little window looking out upon the moor. A sound of horses' feet was heard, and people speaking below ; and, the moment after, the great bell rang, scaring Margaret and her lover into their place of concealment with very hurried steps.

The voice of the old man was then heard, calling from the top of the stairs, in his loud, sonorous tones, "Come up!" and, the instant after, another tongue shouted,

"Where the fiend are you? Do you hide yourself in the attic? Truth, they say, lies in a well, and wisdom, it seems, at the top of the house."

"Wisdom and truth are not so far separate," said the old man, speaking rather to himself than to the other.

At the same moment, Margaret, who had been leaning on Ralph's arm, took a step forward, and shot a heavy bolt that

was upon the door into the staple ; and then, raising her beautiful lips towards her lover's ear till the sweet breath fanned his cheek, she whispered—"It is the voice of Robert Woodhall, your cousin and mine, Ralph ; though nearer akin to you than to me."

"Little akin in kindness," replied the other, in the same low tone. "I have not seen him for seven or eight years ; so I may well forget his voice. His haughty, imperious mother treated me so ill, and abused me so much, when last I was at the Castle, that I will never go again."

Margaret laid her finger on her lip, terrified lest their retreat should be disclosed by any sound ; for steps were now heard coming fast up the stairs, and more than one visitor seemed to be approaching. The next instant, a voice sounded in the neighbouring room, which both Margaret and Ralph knew well, for it was that of Margaret's own brother ; and, though it was more civil in its tone than that of the first who spoke the words had much of

the rough levity affected by the young and dashing nobility of the day.

“Good morning to you, Moraber,” he said. “I have brought my cousin here, Lord Coldenham’s son—or rather, as I should say, Lord Coldenham’s brother. We want to see which way the hunt has taken. I tell him you are a wise man, and he says me ‘Nay,’ for that no wise man would live on this moor.”

“Fools might be made judges of wise men, and yet not much hanging done in the land,” replied the person he called Moraber; “not for want of folly enough in the judges, but for want of wise men to be judged.”

“Come, Master Moraber, or whatever is your name,” said the voice of Robert Woodhall, “shew us a trick of your art. What in the fiend’s name is this you have got on the table?”

“Something that you cannot understand,” replied the other. “An instrument that makes me see things that you cannot

see. What are you holding out your hand for ? Do you suppose I practise chiromancy ? Or do you come hither for the purpose of insult ? If so, beware of your neck ; for that window is high, and you may have a speedy path to the bottom."

"No, I don't come to insult you," replied the voice of the other, in somewhat craven tones. "How the devil should I know how you tell people's fortunes ?"

"If you want palmistry, go to the Egyptians : I deal not with such trash. The luminous influences which rule the destinies of mankind, and which have been read with truth and certainty from the days of the Chaldean sages down to this present hour, are the letters of the book I study. If you wish to know anything that they may say, regarding your fate, put your questions, and I will answer them ; for I have the horoscope of every man, above the rank of a churl, within fifty miles of this place."

"I don't know well what to ask," replied



the voice of Robert Woodhall; and then there seemed to be a whispered consultation between him and his young companion.

"Yes, yes, ask him *that*," said the voice of Margaret's brother.

"Well, then," continued Robert Woodhall, aloud, "tell me, if you can, what in, all these choppings and changes of the times, shall become of the two kindred houses of Coldenham and Woodhall?"

"They shall be re-united," replied the old man, at once and decidedly; "and that ere four years are over."

"Ah! How is that to be?" demanded Robert Woodhall, seemingly puzzled by the reply; and then, after a moment's pause, he added, "I suppose you mean that I shall marry my fair cousin Maggy."

Margaret's hand pressed tightly on Ralph Woodhall's arm, and her eyes were fixed on the door, as if she hoped that their earnest gaze might reach

the face of the old man, and read upon it the answer, ere it was uttered.


The next moment, however, she heard him reply, "I did not say so. I tell you what *is* to be, not *how* it is to be."

"Well, then, tell me," interrogated Robert Woodhall in a more serious tone, "shall I marry my cousin Margaret?"

"You shall go to the altar with her," replied the old man. But before he could end the sentence, her brother Henry exclaimed.

"You must have changed your manners, and your morals too, Robby, before then, or I tell you fairly I would stop it, even if it were at the altar step."

"It is not for you to stop it, young man," said Moraber; and then, suddenly breaking away from the subject, he added, "If you desire to know which way the hunt has gone, lo! there it goes over the fens hard by; and, if they take not good heed, many a horse, and perhaps some men, will leave their lives there."



“There it goes, by Jupiter!” cried Robert Woodhall. “Come, Hal, come. Do not let us stand wrangling and befooling ourselves here. Let us to horse, and after them.”

And, the next instant, the two young men were heard running rapidly down the stairs.


In the meanwhile, Margaret leaned her forehead upon Ralph Woodhall’s shoulder, and wept. After a brief pause, the old man endeavoured to open the door from the other side.

Ralph drew back the bolt ; but two sad faces met Moraber’s eyes ; for both the lovers had read his words in one sense ; and both, if the truth must be told, put some faith in them.

“Why weeping ?” enquired the old man, gazing kindly at Margaret.

“You told me,” said the beautiful girl, “to be true, and I should be happy. How can I be either true or happy, if I am to wed that man—a man whom I abhor—a man who frightens me ?”

The astrologer smiled. "It shall all be as I have said," he replied, "though you cannot see the how or the when. If the Book of Fate, dear lady, could be laid open before your eyes, it would appear to you only full of darkness and contradiction ; unless you could perceive all the myriads of fine links and intricate threads, which unite event and event together. These I myself cannot see ; and much that my art discloses seems contradictory to me, as well as to yourself. Nevertheless, that it *shall be*, I know ; and if you find my words come not true, and all seeming contradictions melt not away, I give you both leave to call me liar and fool, and, if I be still living, to pluck me by the beard in the public street. Nay, more : in compassion for your weakness, and your partial want of faith, I invite you, when you find events seemingly going contrary to my prediction, to come to me, or send, or write to me, in your dread and apprehension, and I will give you renewed assurance, and perhaps clearer information.



Be not afraid, dear lady ; have faith, and it shall all go well."

Margaret shook her head, and sighed ; and the old man, turning to her lover, asked in a low tone, "When do you go forth?"

"In two or three days," replied Ralph. "But how did you know I *was* going forth?"

"I should be little worth consulting," he answered, "if I knew not so trifling a thing as that. In two or three days!--you must take a long ride before the departure you contemplate. You must go to a place you have not seen for years, and to people that you love not. To-morrow morning, early, instead of hanging about the nest of this sweet bird, mount your horse, and ride away to Coldenham Castle ; see the proud, fierce old lady ; see her eldest son. They will receive you ill, and treat you with neglect--perhaps contempt. But laugh at them, Ralph Woodhall, laugh at them, and mark every thing you see in every chamber

you enter—every chair, and table, and decoration, and piece of tapestry. You shall be better than the proud owner of these things, some day, and have rooms as fine, and ornaments as gorgeous. If the woman is very fierce, just say to her, calmly, that she has not done you justice, and that the day will come when she must think better of you.”

“But I love not to go near her,” replied Ralph. “She is hateful to me in many respects ; she is a bold, harsh, bad woman ; and, moreover, I see not the use of visiting one whose only intercourse with my father or myself led to total estrangement between him and his lordly cousin, and to my mortification and injury.”

“Go !” exclaimed the old man, in a tone of authority. “Go, as I have told you. Let her not say that you slink out of your native county without venturing to see your nearest relations. Perchance she may offer to advance your views.”

“Then I would spurn her offer with contempt,” replied Ralph.

“What!” cried the other, laying his finger lightly upon Margaret’s hand which rested on the table, “what! with *this* in view?”

“Margaret would never wish me to do a mean and base thing,” answered Ralph, “even for the greatest happiness that Heaven could bestow.”

“Go, at all events,” repeated the other, with a look not altogether dissatisfied : “refuse or accept her good offices, as you will ; but go ! And now, mark me farther, youth. You will need a servant with you on your wanderings. I know where you will find one who will suit you.”

“Alas, good sir,” replied Ralph, “I have no means to indulge in such attendance. I can neither afford to pay a servant nor to feed him.”

“Did I not say that I knew one who would *suit* you?” asked the other. “And when I said that, I meant that he would suit you in all respects. The one I speak

of will have payment of a certain kind, but not from you ; and as to the rest, he will find means to feed himself. You must take him with you, for he may be needful. Now mark ! As, on your return homeward from the Castle, you pass through the village of Coldenham, you will see a low, white house six doors from the church. You will know it by the beams of the frame-work shining in lozenges through the whitewash, and by the gables being turned to the road. Stop at the door, and ask for Gaunt Stilling : a lad will come out to you, and you have but to say to him ‘ Moraber says you are to be at Hulling’s Corner, at such an hour of such a day, in order to go through the world with me.’ And, if you are punctual to the time you mention, you will find him at the place to the moment of the appointed hour. Ask him no questions, indulge no vain curiosity, and he will serve you well and faithfully. Nay, more ; he will, in case of need, be able to com-

municate quickly with me, should I not be here when you want counsel or assistance."

Ralph mused a moment ; and then, looking up, frankly answered,

"This is all strange enough ; but I will do as you desire. I hear all the people round say that you are a good and kind man—that you cure them of their ailments, relieve them in their need, and often, by your timely help, turn the trembling scale of fortune in favour of the good and the industrious. You would not do aught, I am sure, to raise hopes that are vain, or to thwart efforts that are honest."

"I would not!" returned the old man, solemnly ; "but I would do the reverse. And now it is time for you both to speed home. The hunt will soon be over. Do you know the way by the black lane ?"

Ralph answered that he did.

"Take that. It is the safest," said the old man, as he led Margaret to the top of the stairs.

CHAPTER VII.

IN a large and handsome room of a splendid building of ancient date—one of the few, which, either in consequence of the political or religious opinions of the owners, escaped ruin during the civil wars—situated upon a gentle eminence on the confines of Nottingham and Lincolnshire, with green turf sloping away to a grove of old trees, which would have rejoiced the heart of Evelyn, could he have wandered amongst them—sat a lady considerably past the prime of life, yet with all the fire of youth in her jet-black eyes. She was not very tall; yet there was something commanding in her


figure and her carriage, which gave a beholder the idea of greater height than she really possessed. Her figure, indeed, had suffered little from the ravages of time ; and, although youthful grace might be gone—the supple, easy, undulation of unstiffened muscles—all the native dignity remained, rendered harsher, but not less remarkable, by a certain degree of stiffness.

No one could deny that the features of that face were handsome ; yet they did not possess that outline which is generally pleasing, and there was something peculiarly repulsive in the expression—perhaps it might be its unfeminineness (to coin a word.) To this, the general cast of the features lent themselves greatly, now that the plump roundness of early life had departed. The nose was aquiline, and strongly marked, though beautifully cut ; the eyebrows were thick, and still quite dark. The eyes, as I have said, were black as jet ; but no small twinkling orbs,

as is frequently the case with very black eyes. On the contrary, they were large and oval. The chin had probably been very beautiful, though somewhat prominent; but now it had that tendency to turn up which age generally gives to that feature when the nose is aquiline. The hair, white as silver, was turned back from the forehead, just suffering two or three little snowy curls to escape about the temple. Her dress was gorgeous, and, even at that hour—it was before noon—she wore a number of costly jewels.

To look upon her, one felt that she was a person of strong will and powerful intellect; but no one could imagine that any of the tender weakuesses of woman's heart had ever found place in that bosom.

She had before her, at the moment I have chosen to present her to the reader, a number of papers—steward's accounts, household books, statements of building-expences, and estimates; but with these she seemed to have done; for, though her



jewelled fingers rested upon them, her head was lifted, and her eyes turned towards the casement, notwithstanding the sun was shining through it fiercely; and on her face was a look of stern desolation—of melancholy, not gentle but hard, which might well picture disappointed expectation of those worldly goods, which always, in the words of the poet—

“Turn to ashes on the lips.”

As she thus sat, a servant entered, and approached quietly within a respectful distance, and then stood waiting for her notice. During a moment, she pursued her reverie, whatever was its subject; but then, seeming to become by degrees conscious of the man's presence, she slightly turned her head and inclined her ear. Well versed in all her ways, the man immediately announced his errand, saying—

“Mr. Ralph Woodhall, my lady, is below, and desires admittance to you.”

"Who? who?" cried the lady, almost starting from her chair, while her face grew alternately white and red, and her eye flashed with angry brightness.


"Mr. Ralph Woodhall, the gentleman said," replied the servant.

"Let the beggar's son ride off!" ejaculated his mistress, fiercely. "He shall not—no, he shall not—Yet stay. Give him admittance; but not at once—not at once. Keep him five minutes or so. Then bring him in."

The servant bowed low, and retired, not at all surprised by bursts of strong feeling, to which he was apparently well accustomed.

As soon as he was gone, the lady rose, and walked up and down the room.

"Ralph Woodhall!" she exclaimed, aloud. "Ralph Woodhall! What can bring him here at the end of seven or eight years? I thought I had freed this house of him and his miserable, inert father. Come to beg, perhaps. Well, no matter;



they can do no great harm, now that my good lord is dead. Or perhaps—yet no, that cannot be. Ralph Woodhall—But, hark ! they are coming.” And she resumed her seat, smoothing her brow, and affecting to look quietly over the papers before her.

The next instant, young Ralph Woodhall was ushered into the room, and his name pompously announced ; but the lady took no notice, and still turned over the papers, comparing one page with another.

Ralph was well dressed ; and the glow of youth and exercise was upon as fine and manly a face as eye could see. He observed, at once, the studied negligence of his reception, and his first impulse was to turn upon his heel and quit the room ; but he thought that, by so doing, he would give the proud woman the advantage ; and, doubting not that it was her intention to keep him standing like a dependent till she chose to notice him, he advanced with

wonderful tranquillity of air, and seated himself in one of the green velvet chairs exactly opposite her, throwing himself back, and looking quietly at the decorations of the room.

Her eye was instantly upon him ; and a bright red glow came into her cheek.

“Young man,” she said, after a moment or two of bitter silence, “nobody seats himself in my presence, till he is asked to do so. You are unmannerly.”

“Pardon me, Lady Coldenham,” replied the young man, boldly. “I seat myself in the presence of any one but my king, and the more readily where I see there are not manners enough to prevent my doing so unasked.”

The lady gazed at him, for an instant, with flashing eyes ; but then something seemed to give a turn to her emotions, and she burst into a laugh, crying —

“This is too good!—You are a scholar, I think, young man. Pray under what professor did you study manners?”

“Under one, Madam, who taught me that riches are not superior to gentle blood,” replied Ralph ; “ that rank is to be respected only where it is combined with loftier qualities ; and that high station should meet with reverence when it is ornamented with courtesy, but not otherwise, except from fools and sycophants.”

“By the book !” exclaimed the lady. “By the book ! Marvellously well remembered and recited. And now, what brings you here, Sir Scholar ? To what do I owe your polite attention ? You come not here without cause—without motive—I suppose.”

“I have been over-persuaded, Lady Col-denham,” replied the young man, “ to ride this way, before I set out upon a somewhat long excursion, in order to make a formal call at the house of my father’s cousin’s widow ; the only title by which you can be known to me—the only title which justifies or gives occasion for my visiting you.”

Instead of a violent burst of passion, which he certainly expected, Lady Coldenham sat perfectly silent, leaned her head upon her hand, and repeated to herself once or twice the words, "The only title!" She recovered herself soon, however, and, with a knitted brow, fiery eye, and stern bitterness of tone, exclaimed, "You are an insolent coxcomb—you always were."

The old man's words recurred to Ralph's mind at that moment, and he replied as he had been prompted, though not with perfect accuracy.

"Lady Coldenham," he said, "you have not done justice to me and mine ; but the time will arrive when you *must* do us justice. I came not here to quarrel with you, or to bandy angry words ; but with some hope that years might have made a change in you, or, at all events, might have banished bitter memories. I find it is not so, and therefore I will take my leave."

Thus saying, he rose, and was about to

depart, when the lady exclaimed vehemently, "Sit down! I wish to speak with you."

He did as she desired; and for several minutes the old lady remained in thought, apparently struggling with some strong emotions in her own breast. At length, she raised her eyes, which had been fixed on the table, and said vacantly, with a quivering lip, "You are bold and harsh, young man; but that I can forgive. I am not timid or tender myself. We are about to part for long, perhaps for ever. Tell me, what can I do for you? If I can do aught, I will. I owe that to the memory of others."

"You can do nothing for me, madam, that I will accept," replied Ralph. "A man must be base indeed to receive favors from one who grants them unwillingly. Happily, I need nothing, and certainly I would accept nothing at your hands, even if I did. I am glad, however, that you have made the offer, as it suffers us to part with less angry words upon our lips than had passed before. I thank you

for your offer ; and now will take my leave."

With these words, he left the room, where the lady remained musing, without uttering a word. On descending to the hall, he was met, in crossing it, by a young gentleman gaily attired, the eldest son of Lady Coldenham, and the actual possessor of the family title and estates. He wanted but a few months of being of age ; but such had been the dominion exercised by Lady Coldenham over her husband, during his life, that he had left, in dying, immense and unusual control over his whole property, to his widow, besides a large jointure. Whispers, indeed, had transpired, that the death-bed of the old lord had presented a painful and unsatisfactory scene ; not only because he had died without faith and hope, but because the domineering spirit of his wife had been exercised, at that last fearful moment, with more violence and eagerness than even during his life time ; that she had watched his bedside, night and

day, not with the purpose of soothing and consoling, but (as the servants judged, from her never suffering him to be alone for a moment with any one) in order to keep him her slave to the last.

The young man looked for a moment at Ralph Woodhall as at a stranger; but then, suddenly recollecting him, he held out his hand frankly, saying—"Ah, Ralph, how is it we never see you now? Why, your face had well nigh passed from my recollection, it is so long since you were here."

"When last I was here, my lord," answered Ralph, "I had no great encouragement to come again."

"Oh, you mean my mother's conduct," returned the young lord. "You should never mind her. She bullies every one. She always did; and if every one she maltreats were to fly from her, she would have no companions but the family portraits. Come along with me. I have a famous mew of hawks to show you, which I have

had trained after the fashion of the olden time."

Ralph, however, pleaded want of leisure ; and, after a few minutes more, spent in kindly conversation, the two young men separated, it must be owned with some regret, upon Ralph's part at least. Lord Coldenham had been the only one of the family who had shown him any kindness in his younger days. He knew him to be like what his father had been ; placable, good-humoured, and generous ; full of honourable impulses, though weak and easily governed ; and he could well have made him a friend, perhaps to the advantage of the young lord himself.

At the great door, he found his horse fastened to a ring ; for the servants, who always take their tone from the leading spirit of the house, had judged it not worth their while to take the beast into the stable, or to hold him till his master descended. Ralph tried to banish all angry feelings ; but

a deep and indignant sense of ill-treatment remained, which he could not master ; and, mounting without delay, he rode off towards the village which lay at the distance of about two miles. His beast being weary, and wanting food, his first care was to seek out the little public-house which he remembered well. He there gave the horse into the charge of the ostler, and then set out for the house which had been indicated to him, as the place where he would find a servant.

As he strolled along through the village, he could not help remarking the increased appearance of decay which was manifest in all the houses, the buildings, and the little gardens. Though never very prosperous, Coldenham, when last he saw it, had appeared at least neat and comfortable ; but now the broken thatches, covered, but not concealed, by house-leek ; the windows patched, or very often without glass ; the railings and fences dilapidated, and insufficient to keep out the pigs and cattle ; and

the gardens half cultivated, and full of weeds—presented a sad change.

The only building which remained much as he had seen it, was the old church, standing upon a piece of ground raised a good deal above the road, with its graveyard surrounded by a low stone wall. Ralph paused for a moment, and gazed up at the tall, thin, graceful spire which he remembered having contemplated often in former years, wondering how it had been built to such a height. All was as he had seen it then. The tooth of time had gnawn it in years long past, crumbling down the richly cut ornaments, corbels, and gargoyles ; but, as if the destroying monster could sometimes weary of his diet, there was no appearance of his having touched the building since Ralph stood before it last. Nor had anything been done to improve it: the same green, mossy look which had been given to the stone, by the damp air sweeping across the fens, still remained ; and one of

the coping-stones of the little cemetery wall, which had fallen off, and which he had often seen lying immediately within the fence, was lying there still, unreplaced.

The door was open. Walking through the cemetery, the young man went in. The tombs of his ancestors were there, and he wished to look once more at them before he went afar. As he passed up the aisle, he soon stood before the monument of Sir Robert Woodhall, who was considered the founder of the family. A gorgeous monument it was—richly carved and ornamented ; and the gratitude of the old knight's posterity had recorded, upon a tablet on one side, the numerous virtues, real or imaginary, of the dead ; *videlicet*, how he had fought for his sovereign in the field—how he had aided him with his wisdom in the council—and how he had left two sons, both of whom he had lived to see dignified as peers of the realm. Then came the tombs of the two sons, Robert, Lord

Coldenham, and Ralph, Lord Woodhall ; and then the tombs of two more ; another Robert, the grandfather of his own father, and of the late Lord Coldenham, and another Ralph, the progenitor of the present Lord Woodhall. They were all Roberts and Ralphs, with the exception of here and there a Henry, like a graft upon an old stock.

Every one has felt the eternally-speaking moral of old monuments ; the comment they are for ever reading upon the vanity of all the struggles, passions, and hopes of earth—upon the vanity of vanities, ambition. I will not, therefore, dwell upon it any further than as it affected the young man who there stood and gazed, and who might feel that he came to that reverend spot with over-eager longing, with strong desires and aspirations after worldly greatness—after things which, whether as a means or an end, are but part of that great strife which ends in emptiness. Around him, gathered into one small space not a dozen

yards square, lay a multitude of his own kin who had struggled, and toiled, and hoped, and desired, like himself—who had even succeeded ; and had yet inherited nothing, for all their pains, but six feet of earth, and that piece of mouldering marble ; while the very deeds which had gained them lustre and renown, their hopes, fears, and exertions, occupied a point far less in the waste of time than their grave on the surface of the earth.

Feeling sad and reproved, he was turning away, when a voice near him said, “Would not the best epitaph of all be, ‘He lived and he died?’ It is all that can be said with certainty of any man.”

On turning his head round, Ralph perceived, standing near him, and looking over his shoulder, an elderly man in the dress of a peasant well to do. He had put off his shoes, and laid down his hat, somewhere about the church ; and, by these indications, Ralph concluded rightly that he was the sexton. He asked him whe-

ther it was so, however, and the old man replied,—

“Yea, truly, I am the sexton.”

“You were not here when I was last in Coldenham,” said Ralph. “What has become of Harrison, who was sexton here before you?”

The old man pointed with his finger to the pavement saying, “Down there. He is good as a lord now, and occupies just as much room. When he died, I was sent for by the old lady; for I come from a distance—out of Dorsetshire, her own county.”

“Then of course you are a great friend of hers,” observed Ralph.

“Nay, why should you think so?” asked the old man.

“Because she put you in this good office,” replied Ralph.

“That is no reason,” retorted the sexton; “gifts do not always come from favor, nor fortune either. I take what I get, and am thankful. I ask not whence it comes,

nor why. I cannot be the friend of a great lady, nor the friend of a proud lady. *Good* office call you it ? Marry, the dead often do good to the living, and so it is with me ; but the living do no good to the dead ; and so, in one sense, the office is *not* a good one. It is like that of the hangman, who is said to do the last offices to a culprit ; but mine go beyond his, and are the only true last offices ; for I give back to the earth what the earth gave to the light, and there is no hand between mine and eternity."

The conversation had a sombre hue, and Ralph sought to turn it, saying, "It seems to me that the village is much decayed since I last saw it. The people do not appear so comfortable—so much at ease—as when I was here before."

"How should they be so ?" asked the sexton. "The many are always more or less dependent on the few ; and, in a country village of this land, they derive their prosperity from the great folks near them.

Mind, young master : I speak of prosperity ; not alone of wealth but of the happiness that cheers labour—of the protection which prompts it—of the example which leads in the right way, and of the generosity which rewards those who follow it. How would you have the people prosperous here, with no one of wealth and station near them, but an old woman all pride and diamonds, whose sole object is to maintain her state ; and her two sons, whose only bounties are the riding over our fields and gardens, and the debauching of our wives and daughters ? Marry ! well may the fences go to ruin, the thatch to decay, and the roof-tree fall in. There is a good receipt for rendering a place desolate, and these people have found it.”

“ I perceive so, my good man,” said Ralph. “ But you speak freely of dangerous things.”

“ I fear not, master,” rejoined the old sexton, with a quiet smile ; “ although, to say truth, I might not speak such things if you

were not a travelling stranger in the place."

"I am nearer akin to those you mention than you are aware of," observed Ralph, turning towards the door. "But be not afraid ; I will not betray you, for I think much as you do."

"I am not the least afraid." replied the sexton, following him slowly, and taking up his shoes and hat as he went. "I shall do very well, whatever is said of me."

Ralph walked on, and took the little path branching to the right from the church porch, which led in the direction of the house that Moraber had described. It was at no great distance beyond ; so that you could see it from the little gate of the church-yard ; and Ralph was surprised, as he advanced through the old elms that shaded the little graves, to observe the neatness and air of comfort which the dwelling presented. It was larger, and more roomy too, than most of the other houses near ; for the doctor and the lawyer had not yet


sprung up in every village in the land, and the parsonage was the only good-looking edifice in Coldenham, except the church.

Before the door, on a little patch of green, which separated it from the road, stood a fine old oak, greatly decayed in the heart, but having a bench underneath its shattered branches, where the cool air might be enjoyed on a summer's evening. Pausing a moment beside the tree, Ralph looked up at the dwelling with some doubts, as to whether he was right or not.

The persevering old sexton was upon him the next moment, asking in his ordinary, quaint tone, "Seek you any one there young gentleman?"

"Yes, I do," replied Ralph, "if I am right in the house. I am seeking a young man named Stilling."

"An old man named Stilling is talking to you," said the sexton. "But what is the christian name of the man you seek?"



“Gaunt Stilling, I was told to ask for,” replied Ralph. “Are you his father?”

“So it is supposed,” answered the old man. “But he is not within. Will you come in, and wait till he returns?”

“I must needs see him,” returned Ralph, thoughtfully ; and at the same moment the old man opened the door which led into the house. As he did so, a female figure, and a beautiful face, of which Ralph had but a single glance, passed suddenly across the passage, giving one look round, and then disappearing instantly.

The young man made no remark ; but he thought he saw traces of tears upon the bright face that glanced by him. The sexton’s countenance fell a little ; but, bating not his courtesy to the stranger, he led him into a neat, sanded parlour and pressed him to take some refreshment. With his own hands he brought in some cheese, and bread, and excellent butter ; and then went out and fetched a foaming, brown jug of good strong ale.


“Homely fare for a young gentleman of

the house of Woodhall," he said ; and he continued to talk and moralise for some ten minutes, while Ralph, to say the truth, enjoyed his viands amazingly.

At the end of that time, the young man began to ask questions in return ; but their further conversation was interrupted by the dashing up of a splendid horse to the door. To Ralph's surprise, the old sexton started from his seat, ran to the outer door and turned the key in it. Then, after looking at it for a moment with a grim smile, he came back to the little parlour, saying to himself, " Nay, nay, not so."

He had hardly seated himself, when a hand was laid upon the latch of the outer door, and some one pushed hard. The lock, however, barred all entrance, and the visitor knocked once or twice, saying, " Kate, Kate, let me in."

" Thou wilt soon have some one to deal with thee," muttered the old man in a low tone ; and, a moment after, another horse



was heard coming quickly along the road. Then followed the sound of angry voices.

"Get home with you!" cried one. "I warned you before ; and, be you lord's son or beggar's son, if I see you within a hundred yards of that house, I will give you such a hiding as will take some of the rankness out of you."

"Insolent scoundrel !" ejaculated another voice, in the tones of which Ralph thought he recognized those of Robert Woodball. "I have a great mind to send my sword through you ; and, if it were not for Kate's sake, I would. But you shall be punished for your insolence, notwithstanding. Lady Coldenham will soon send you and your old puritanical father packing back to Dorsetshire."

"As for your sword," replied the other, in a scornful tone, "you dare not draw it out of its sheath ; and if you did, I would break it over your back. As for your mother, you had better go and ask her

what she will do before you announce it. I have seen her since you have ; and, proud as she is, she will not back you in your rascality. Get you gone speedily ; for my fingers itch to seize you by the throat and grind your face into the mud. But you are a coward, as well as a scoundrel, and not worth punishing. You have done harm enough already, and you shall do no more harm here."

After these words, there was a momentary pause, sufficient for any one to mount on horseback ; and then the prancing of a horse's feet, while Robert Woodhall's voice uttered some words apparently of a very offensive nature ; for, although Ralph could not hear them distinctly, they were followed by a loud and angry exclamation from the other person, who added, "If you boast truly, I will have the best blood in your heart."

Some one then cantered away from the house ; and the old sexton rose and unlocked the door, giving admission to a

youth of three or four and twenty years of age, whose form, at first sight, appeared so lithe and spare as to be fitted only for great agility, but which, when examined with a more careful eye, shewed all the indications of great strength in sinewy muscles and exact proportions. His face was heated, and he entered the room with a hurried step, but stopped short on perceiving a stranger.

"Calm thyself—calm thyself," said his father; "thou art too hot and rash, my son. Hast thou said to the old woman what I told thee?"

The son nodded affirmatively; and then the father added—

"Not a word more or less?"

"Not a word," replied the son.

"Then he will come here no more," said the father. "But yet, as it is impossible to put bridles upon young men, bred up in luxury and vice, it were well to follow the course we have determined, and we must set about it quickly. Here is a gentleman,

my son, who has come to ask for thee. Learn what it is he seeks."

"What is it you would with me, sir?" inquired the young man, addressing Ralph in a civil tone.


"I have but a message to give," replied Ralph: "Moraber says that you are to be at Hulling's Corner at nine o'clock of the morning on Thursday next, to go through the world with me."

"That gives but two clear days," observed the young man, looking at his father. "It cannot be."

"Yes—yes, it can," cried the old man, eagerly. "You must not deny him, boy."

"But I will not have her stay here," said the younger Stilling. "Come what will, *that* shall not be."

"I will go with her myself," rejoined the old man. "You can remain here till Thursday morning. By that time, I shall be on my way back, and at home by Friday night. He shall come, sir—he shall come. Tell our friend that he will not fail."



"If you mean the person calling himself Moraber," said Ralph, "I shall not see him again before I depart ; but, doubtless, he will know of your son's compliance with his wishes."

"Oh, yes, he will not fail to know," answered the sexton. "But why do you say, 'calling himself Moraber?' Think you that that is not his real name?"

"It is clearly a foreign name," replied Ralph Woodhall ; "and his tongue bespeaks the Englishman."

"Oh, he knows many things that you little dream of," answered the old man ; "and can speak in one tongue as well as in another. However, my son shall be with you at the time and place."

"I would fain know first, who I am going with," said Gaunt Stilling.

"My name is Ralph Woodhall," replied that gentleman ; "the son of Mr. Woodhall of the Grange."

The other paused, and mused for a moment or two, after which, he said—


"Well, sir, I will go with you. I have heard you spoken well of—the only one of your name."

"Nay, nay," interposed Ralph; "my cousin Henry, Lord Woodhall's son, is surely an exception to your censure."

"He is well enough," replied the other; "not so bad as the worst, nor so good as the best; but he may pass among young blades for a phoenix, perhaps."

"Well, but his sister Margaret," said Ralph, the colour slightly deepening in his cheek. "Surely you have no ill word to say of her?"

"Oh, oh! Sits the wind so?" cried Gaunt Stilling, with a laugh; but, the moment after, he added, in a grave and earnest tone, "No, sir, I have no word to say against her. She is ever named as a good and sweet young lady, gentle to every one, kind and generous to the poor. She is very beautiful, too; that I can testify, for I once saw her. He who wins her will be a rich man, for she is a trea-




sure. However, sir, I will be at the place appointed on Thursday morning, and be ready to serve you to the best of my power ; and all the more willingly, because you are hated by those whom I hate. It is a good sign to have such men's enmity."

After this engagement, Ralph waited no longer ; but, taking leave of the old sexton and his son, and thanking the former for his hospitality, he returned for his horse to the little ale-house, mounted, and rode away.

CHAPTER VIII.

HAPPILY for Ralph Woodhall, the morning was bright and beautiful. I say "happily," although, as far as his own person was concerned, he would have little cared had the rain poured down as it has never poured since the time of Noah. The sparkling brilliancy of the morning, however, cheered his spirits, and lightened the weight of parting with those he loved. It is curious how much there is in association, and how a sort of latent superstition mingles with all associations, especially those connected with the weather. "Happy is the bride that the sun shines upon : happy is the dead that




the rain rains upon," is an old proverb. The day is said to "frown" upon an enterprise ; and what man exists, who, undertaking anything in which great interests are involved, sees a gloomy and menacing sky over his head, and does not thence draw evil auguries ?

The morning, as I have said, was bright and smiling when Ralph Woodhall set out upon his journey. All Nature appeared to rejoice : the fresh green trees, the sparkling river, even the dark brown moor, seemed to revel in the sunshine ; and the light air waved the branches, and carried, now and then, a small floating shadow from a hardly seen cloud over the bosom of the landscape, bringing out the brightness with stronger effect.

The moment was one which Ralph had dreaded. The parting had been very different before ; first, because the tenderer ties which bound him to that spot had not then been so strong, and secondly, because, on every former occasion, a limit had been

fixed to his proposed absence. He had gone to the University for his term, and knew, or hoped, that when it was ended he should return. But now all was vague and misty. Months, years, the better part of life itself, might wane before he saw his father's house again. And then, the long, long absence from Margaret! It was in vain to reason with himself that departure afforded the only chance of winning her—that to linger on there, spending hours which should be devoted to active exertion in the storm-foretelling calm of temporary happiness, was only to ensure bitter disappointment, and to render that disappointment ten times more bitter. It was all in vain. He had looked forward to the moment of parting with dread. But, as I have observed, the brightness, and the light, and the sparkling of the scene, gave preponderance to hope over fear. It was like a happy omen to him: seeming to promise the smile of



Heaven upon his endeavours, the sunshine of success to light his way.


Early in the morning, with the first light, he had risen from his bed and made his final arrangements for departure. All that he intended to take absolutely with him, had been packed into two large leathern bags, commonly used by travellers in those days, which were strapped to the back of the saddle. A capacious trunk-mail, filled with a variety of little articles that he prized—books, gifts from friends, and some curious relics of olden times—and all the fine apparel that he possessed, was to go by one of those innumerable carriers who at that time traversed the country in every direction ; often following paths peculiar to themselves, and, at one period, when the plague was raging in the land, actually tracking out new roads, or changing small bye-lanes into high ways, in order to avoid infected places.

When he was dressed, and ready, he descended quietly to his father's room, and

opened the door with a gentle hand ; for Mr. Woodhall was never a very early riser, and Ralph fancied that he might be still asleep. He found him, however, lying reading in his bed ; and, after a brief parting, not without its tenderness and depth of feeling, however few the words might be, the young man retired. When he was near the door, old Mr. Woodhall exclaimed, " Ralph, Ralph !" and added, when his son turned towards him, " You have not forgotten your Cicero, I hope. You said you would put him in your saddle-bags. He is a good companion, Ralph."

His son assured him that Cicero had not been forgotten, and then departed.

His next farewell was a silent one, but not less full of emotion. There was a little rise in the ground upon the road which he travelled, whence the whole of one side of the mansion of Woodhall was visible to the wanderer's eye. The house was indeed so near, that the small ornaments of



stone-work could be easily distinguished across the stream ; and at one of the windows, which, by some means or other he had learned to know better than any of the rest, a fair face was gazing out towards the road. Ralph paused for an instant, and waved his hand. A hand was waved in return ; and then Margaret retreated hastily from the open window, and he thought he could see her kneel down at the foot of the bed, as if to pray or to weep.

“I will win her, or die!” ejaculated Ralph to himself ; and that last interview armed him, perhaps more than all else, to struggle with the difficulties before him. Nothing on earth is so invigorating to the wrestler, man, in his combat with the world, as a strong passion and a strong resolution.

From that spot he rode on rapidly, gaining the higher country by degrees ; sometimes sweeping over a bare hill side, sometimes passing along under a bank, from

which stretched out a canopy of trees. At the distance of about four miles, was a small hamlet, whence the inhabitants of the cottages had principally gone forth to their early labours in the field ; but an old woman, withered and blear, with a face such as would easily have made a witch, in any land, not more than fifty years previously, was sitting spinning at one of the doors.

As the young traveller came up, she raised her eyes, and said aloud—" Ay, folk ride fast who ride to ill."

Ralph heard the words ; and, being somewhat more impressible that morning than usual, he checked his horse and turned towards the old crone. " Why say you so, mother ?" he asked. " I have never done you any ill. On the contrary, I have endeavoured to benefit you, and your son's family, also."

" Ay, it does not matter, Master Ralph," replied the old woman, shaking her head. " What I said is true, notwithstanding."

And she repeated it.



"Do you mean to say I am riding to do ill, or to suffer ill?" asked the young man.

"To suffer more than you know of," replied the old woman.


"Then I do not thank you for telling me so," said Ralph, half angrily; and, turning his horse, he rode away at the same quick pace as before.

For an instant or two, the old woman's words made some impression on his mind; but then, hope and expectation bounded up again. He looked to the bright blue heaven, and the glorious sun, and the sparkling landscape; and, unconsciously giving a wave of his hand towards it, he exclaimed,

"I go with no evil purpose—I will do no base deed; and the God who made all things—who rolls the stars aloft, and brightens the skies above, and sends rain to fertilize and sunshine to vivify—will guide, provide for, and protect me also."

The distance to Halling's Corner, where

he was to meet his new servant, was considerable ; but when he reached the spot, no one was to be seen. It was a place where two roads crossed, and Ralph looked up and down each of them. No one was in sight. Taking out one of the cumbrous watches of the day, the young man found that, by dint of riding fast, he had arrived nearly half an hour before the time appointed. There was nothing for it but patience ; so, dismounting, he loosened the girths and walked the horse up and down. At the end of about twenty minutes, while he was a few yards distant from the corner, he heard the voice of some one singing a common country air of the time ; and when he could see down the other road, he perceived a horseman coming quietly up at a jog trot. Rightly concluding that it was his new man, Gaunt Stilling, he waved his hand for him to make haste, and proceeded to refix his saddle. The other, however, did not hurry his pace in the least ; and, when he reached the spot,



Ralph told him, somewhat impatiently, that he had been waiting half an hour.

Stilling smiled good-humouredly, and replied,

“ Well, sir, you are now master and I am man, and it is bad for the master to wait for the man ; but I have heard that, in point of punctuality, it is as wrong to be too soon as too late. It wants at least five minutes of the hour, if I judge the time right.”

“ No harm can happen from being a little too soon,” said Ralph.

“ Sometimes it may, sir,” answered Gaunt Stilling. “ Many a man has got his bones broken for being half an hour too soon. As, for instance : if a man appoints another to help him in a fray, and gets before his enemy half an hour earlier than his friend, he will have time to take a mighty good drubbing for his lack of punctuality.”

“ True, true,” said Ralph : “ punctuality is, I believe, the best rule after all ; and punctuality admits of no deviations

My horse carried me somewhat more speedily than usual."

"More's the pity, sir," remarked Stilling; "for his pace will not be so good, nor his strength so enduring, as if he had come slower. 'Take a horse out coolly; bring him as cool,' is a good maxim in my part of the country.—But here is a letter, I have to give you."

Ralph took it, and looked at the superscription, which imported, "To his Grace the Duke of Norfolk, greeting. These by the hands of Ralph Woodhall, Esquire—a gentleman of mark."

"Who gave you this, for me?" asked Ralph.

"I know not, sir," answered Stilling. "It was left at our house."

"I have another letter for the Duke," said Ralph, thoughtfully. "Who can this be from?"

"Two are always better than one," replied his companion. "One may hit the nail that another misses."

"If so, it is fortunate," rejoined Ralph,

"for I am going straight to the Duke's house in Norwich, judging that he might best forward my views."

"I fancied that you would wing your flight thither, sir," said the other, "as soon as I saw that letter."

"Why so," demanded Ralph, "if you know not from whom this came?"

"Because I judged that no one would send you a letter for a place to which he did not know you were going," was Stilling's reply ; and with it Ralph was obliged to be content ; for it was very clear that if the man did really know more, he was in no mood for telling it. One question, however, he did ask after they had mounted and were on their way.

"Do you know, Stilling," he said, "whether this letter is, or is not, from old Lady Coldenham ? My conduct in regard to it will be decided by your answer ; for, if it be from her, I will not present it : not that I fear the nature of its contents, for she can say nothing truly against me ; but be-

cause I will receive no favour at her hands, for reasons of my own."

"Would that all others had such reasons, or had attended to them!" ejaculated the servant, in a somewhat bitter tone; but then, suddenly changing his manner, he added, "The contents you can easily see, sir, for the letter is unsealed. I am certain, however, it is not from the dame at the castle, as I know her hand right well."

"I certainly shall not open it," answered Ralph, as they rode on. "I hold that the man who opens a letter entrusted to his care, and reads the contents, whatever be his excuse, must feel himself a base and degraded being for ever. Worse, far worse, than an eaves-dropping spy; for the latter has nothing trusted to his honour—the other, everything."

"What, sir, if the letter is left open for the purpose?" enquired the other.

"Ay, under any circumstance," answered Ralph; "we cannot widen the line between honorable and dishonorable dealing. Un-



less I am clearly told that a letter is intended for my reading, nothing should induce me to read it."

"If all men held so," observed Gaunt Stilling, "many a famous general would have been defeated—many a gallant army beaten—many a great victory lost."

"Not so," replied Ralph. "When I am at war, any property I can take from my enemy is mine—his secrets against myself above all ; but for opening any other letter there is no excuse. No man can tell what may be in it—no one can tell that secrets, which the writer would not have published for the world, and not at all affecting those to whose sense of honor they are confided, may not lie hidden within that little fold of paper. Oh, how one ought to blush, if, venturing upon such an act on any pretence, one were to find within that which no man of honor ought ever to have seen. No, no, Stilling : I will never look into a letter intrusted to me, let the consequences to myself be what they may."

"I don't suppose the consequences could well be bad," returned Stilling; "for, I suppose, no one would give you an open letter, containing abuse of yourself—unless, indeed, they knew your prejudices about such things. So you can put the letter by, and give it to the Duke in all safety, I believe."

"The other letter which I have for the Duke," returned Ralph, "I shall deliver first, as I know who it comes from."

Ralph quickened his pace a little; but Gaunt Stilling, though exceedingly respectful, seemed to have a will of his own, and not to be at all inclined to over-hurry the beast that bore him. He lingered behind, and the conversation consequently dropped.

At the end of about a mile and a half, however, Ralph, who had ridden on nearly three hundred or four hundred yards, and might well be supposed by any observer to have no connection with the young man who followed, had his ear at-



tracted by some sound behind him ; and, turning round his head, he beheld his new servant off his horse, and undergoing the very unpleasant process of being well cud-gelled by three stout men. It was a woody part of the country, properly suited for an ambush ; somewhat like the scenes which the famous Dutch painter chose for his attacks by banditti. To save him, as much as possible, from the infliction which he was undergoing, Ralph returned at full speed ; and, as Stilling was struggling with all his might, which was not little, and had nearly mastered one of his opponents, although the others were beating him all the time, his master's coming to his help turned the strife in his favour. An immediate inclination to flight displayed itself on the part of his assailants ; but Ralph contrived to get a thrust at one of them with his sword blade, ere he ran away, and at all events drew blood ; while Stilling, taking advantage of the assistance afforded, pummelled, in no very gentle manner, the one on whom

he had principally fixed his attention before he let him go.

The men, who speedily disappeared in the wood, were disguised with handkerchiefs tied round, and partly over, their faces ; but Stilling seemed either to know them, or to have very little curiosity ; for, when his master asked him, in one breath, whether he was hurt, and if he knew the men who had attacked him, or their object, he replied very briefly, that he was not hurt, and, as to the men, that he knew all about them, and what brought them there. He showed, in short, so little disposition to be communicative, that Ralph resolved to ask no farther questions, but, bidding him follow more closely, hurried on at a quicker pace than ever, and, soon after, reached a better-beaten and more travelled road.




CHAPTER IX.

IN the fine old town of Norwich—I believe even to the present day—are the remains of an ancient inn, which once stood not far from the river Wansum. Nothing now remains of it but a gable or two, transmuted to purposes very much below the dignity of receiving two-legged guests. Then, however, it was the principal inn in Norwich. A great change had come over the state and condition of our inns since the time of Chaucer.

In the days of which I write, inns had reached, in England, very nearly the climax of perfection. Hotels were an abomination unknown, although the name, descended

from the Anglo-Norman times, still lingered in various parts of the country. Cleanliness, neatness, perfect ease and independence, characterized the inn of former years: the linen was as white as snow, and the food was generally of the best kind, however plain the cookery. There a man might take the world as it came; there he might pass his time, as in a dream; none of the hard realities of life obtruded on him, so long as he had in his purse wherewithal to satisfy the demands of his host, which in those days were not very extravagant. There he might escape the impertinence, the annoyance, the importunity of the world. There he might riot, or meditate, or read, or write, or think, or sleep, just as he pleased, without interruption. An old English inn afforded the most perfect species of liberty, without having any of the drawbacks of confusion and anarchy. No tax-gatherer ever came there—at least with the knowledge of the guests; even the constable was seen drinking his pot, or ladling



out his punch, or smoking his pipe, with the other friendly persons round the bar ; and, so long as order and decency were maintained—and perhaps a little longer—no one interfered with the freedom and ease that reigned within. Rightly did Ben Jonson, and Shenstone, and Samuel Johnson, exult in the welcome liberty of an inn.

The Half-moon, at the time I mention, was one of this sort ; and towards it, in the first instance, as directed by others of experience, Ralph Woodhall went his way, on his arrival in the city of Norwich, on a somewhat gloomy morning about eleven o'clock. Before he took rest, however, or did more than brush his clothes from dust, remove the heavy saddle-bags from their convenient position behind the saddle, and let his beast get a little refreshment and food, Ralph re-mounted, and rode away towards another part of the town, higher up on the Wansum. This was the antiquated house, or palace, of the old Dukes of Norfolk, in which, during their brief

terms of residence in Norwich, they kept up, in a limited sphere, the state and dignity of a sovereign prince.

Some doubt existed in the mind of Ralph, when he arrived in the city, as to whether the nobleman on whom fancy, for the time, seemed to make his hopes depend, was in the town or not ; but, as he passed along the streets, the number of servants which he saw in the Howard liveries, and the gaiety and bustle which pervaded one quarter of the city, shewed him that, so far as finding the Duke, his first expectations were likely to be fulfilled.

The antique gateway, with servants crowded under it—the wall surrounding the grounds, which extended to the river—and the massive pile of the principal building itself—did not much impress him ; for he thought it very like one of the colleges at Cambridge, to which his eye was well accustomed.


Appearing on horseback, and with a servant behind him, the gates were moved

back by the retainers in the porch, to give him admission into the court ; and, descending there, he was led, whilst Stilling remained to look after the horses, to a little apartment on the ground-floor, called the Chamberlain's office. There he explained his business, by simply saying that he brought a letter for the Duke, from Lord Woodhall ; and the grave-looking officer to whom he spoke, taking the letter from his hand, led him into a waiting-room, where he found three other persons, already in attendance on the Duke's leisure. Each man was amusing the weary moments of expectation as best he might : one looking out of the window, which displayed an orchard in full beauty ; one walking up and down the room, with eyes fixed on the floor and hands behind the back ; and one seated at a large table, examining some books which had been laid there, probably to beguile the time.

Patience and silence seemed to be the order of the day ; and Ralph, after

looking curiously at the splendid furniture which decorated even that plain room, betook himself to one of the volumes which soon afforded him sufficient amusement to pass half an hour pleasantly. While he read, one after another of his companions in attendance was called out of the room ; and at length, laying down the book, he fell into a reverie of that kind which often comes upon us during vacant moments—when brief summings up of the testimony borne by events to the progress of our fate, during a certain period just past, are made by memory, and left to the judgment of the mind, to see if anything can be done with the case or not.

The great step was taken. Here he was, many miles from home, seeking his fortune, as the term was then. He had entered the house of one who could, at will, advance his views or neglect his cause, with nothing to recommend him but a letter from a distant relation, and another from a person he did not know. Something, however, bearing on his destiny, was to be




decided soon ; and he felt all that eager, fluttering, anxiety of youth, which every man, in early years, must have experienced, when the great object of the moment was in the balance. There was not much cause for hope, indeed ; and expectation, even under the exaggeration of youth, could hardly see space to stand upon ; but Love is a great fanner of the flame of Hope ; and Love was always mingling a word with all Ralph's cogitation.

Some lesser incidents, too, which had lately occurred, presented themselves to the young man's mind, when the greater facts were discussed. The interview with the strange personage calling himself Moraber, the conduct of Lady Coldenham, the meeting with Gaunt Stilling, and the misadventure which had occurred to the latter on the road—all these passed in review. The demeanour of his new servant, together with his circumstances and his conduct, puzzled him most. What was he ? Why did he at once obey the order to follow him ? Was there any secret brotherhood or asso-

ciation in the land, like that of the disciples of the Old Man of the Mountains, which bound its members to follow implicitly the orders of an unknown superior? There had been at that time whispers of such a league; and, if Stilling was a member thereof, what dangers and obstructions might not his own course be brought amongst, by retaining the services of a person, over whose conduct another maintained so absolute and independent a control?

The man's manner had not been without remarkable points. Perfectly respectful, he always was; but that he had his own particular notions, and liked them better than all others, he did not fail to show. He appeared to have no feeling of degradation from the office of servant which he assumed. He gave no vain reason for his obedience; but something was in his manner which seemed to say, "I have taken upon me certain duties; and the only proper—the only honourable—course, is to fulfil them to the very best of my



ability. No honest task degrades a man, though the vanity of shirking it, or the fault of neglecting its requirements, when undertaken, may degrade him. These are the only acts which can make the position of a servant humiliating. He is as honourable as his master, if he does his duty as well."


No task seemed too hard for Stilling: the very words "*menial services*," so often used obnoxiously by the mean and vulgar, he seemed to scorn. His pride was in doing well what he undertook. He appeared to feel that, in doing so, he made himself, in Nature's book, equal with all, superior to many, placed conventionally above him by station and wealth. He would trust the horses to none other than himself; he was careful of his young master's wardrobe; he refused to sit down with him at table, even in small inns, where such a course was common both in England and France.

All this showed a high mind and a clear intellect; but his character had several puz-

thing points. Sometimes—and indeed this seemed his general humour—he was as gay as the lark, full of glee and merriment; but, ever and anon, he would fall into deep reveries—fits of thought—profound, even sad—from which it was difficult to rouse him.

Some days after the period of which I write, he received a letter by the carrier, which seemed to diminish both the frequency and the intensity of these attacks of moodiness; but that had not occurred when Ralph sat in the room at the Duke of Norfolk's, as I have mentioned; and the temper or character of his servant had still, to his eyes, all the first sharp lines about it.

He was busily engaged in reflections on all these things, when a stately servant, who had called the others out to the presence of the Duke, came to summon him also, and led him, with slow and formal steps, to another room on the same floor. Little do the great of this world know, how any



stiff, haughty, or repulsive manner affects those who, reasonably or unreasonably, have been building up hopes on their influence or kindness ; what lustre urbanity and gentleness give to a favour intended to be conferred ; or how, by courtesy, a disappointment is softened and diminished. Very frequently, the man who will give thousands in charity will not spare a kind word, although it would relieve pangs a hundred-fold more bitter than any which gold can touch. Honor, high honor, to that man who does generous acts generously ! There are some such in the world, and, thank God, I know them ; but they are not many.

The manner of the Duke of Norfolk was freezing in the extreme. He received his young visitor standing ; and, before hearing anything he had to say, informed him, in a tone which was cold, though apologetic, that he was in some haste, as he had to go out. Ralph was the more surprised, as the Duke had established, generally, a character for

courtesy in his dealings with people of inferior rank. He presented the letter of Lord Woodhall, however, with the hope that that might produce some change in the great man's manner.

Such was not the case. The Duke opened the letter, ran his eye hastily over it, as a somewhat tiresome ceremony ; and then, folding it up again, stood silent, as if expecting either that Ralph would say something, or go. Seeing, however, that the young man remained silent likewise, his Grace at length said, " Well, Mr. Woodhall, I must think over this, and will let you hear from me in a few days. Tell my Chamberlain where you are to be found in Norwich."

" I do not think, my lord Duke, that I shall be here very long," replied Ralph, making up his mind, with the rapid rashness of youth, to expect nothing more from the haughty nobleman before him. " I have another letter, however, which I may as well deliver to your Grace now, lest I

should not have an opportunity of seeing you again."

The Duke seemed surprised, and not quite pleased; but Ralph took out the letter which Stilling had brought him, put it in the nobleman's hand, and was about to retire. The moment the Duke of Norfolk saw the superscription, however, a great change came over his face.

"Stay, stay!" he cried. "Let me see what this letter contains before you go." And he ran his eye, quickly, but with evident attention, over the few lines within. Before he had quite done, he waved his hand towards a seat, saying, "Pray sit down, Mr. Woodhall," and then resumed the perusal. As soon as he had finished, he took a seat himself, and, looking upon Ralph with a smiling countenance, enquired why he had not given him that letter first.

"Because, my Lord Duke," replied Ralph, "I thought the other, from my cousin, Lord Woodhall, the most important. I do not actually know by whom the

epistle you hold in your hand was written, it having been sent to me to deliver, without any other intimation ; but I suspect that it comes from a person so inferior in position to Lord Woodhall, that it might have had less weight in your opinion than the other."

The Duke smiled. " You were mistaken," he said. " We, in the great world, learn to estimate affairs somewhat differently from others who have not mingled much with matters of general concern ; and we give less weight than people generally imagine, to rank and wealth. Lord Woodhall is a very excellent nobleman, and my particular good friend ; but *this* gentleman," and he laid his hand significantly upon the paper, " is a very singular and extraordinary personage. Even in these days of infinite oddities, he is very remarkable ; and, besides his originality, he is a man of immense power of mind, strong will, and vast patience, and is unchangeable in his purposes ; probably, from a fixed opinion that

certain things are to be, and that it is only desired he should shape his course by them, and follow that course perseveringly, in order to succeed in his endeavours. This turn has been given to his mind by a passion for judicial astrology, which he imbibed when he and I were fellow-students together at Oxford. He then belonged to Brazen-nose College, where that science, or pretended science, was a good deal cultivated ; and, although he never made a convert of me, I cannot but admit that many of his predictions have had a very curious accomplishment. For instance : he named to me, long ago, that a change, materially affecting the position of the Crown of England, would take place during the first week of February, one thousand six hundred and eighty five. I read the prophecy to imply the death of the King ; but, throughout the whole of January His Majesty remained perfectly well ; and I saw him, on the first of February, without one token of decay, either in

body or mind. I imagined my good friend's prediction would fail ; when lo, came the startling news that the King had been struck with apoplexy. You know the rest of the events of that week. His Majesty died on the sixth, and a great change indeed took place."

The Duke paused, and seemed to give his mind up to memory for some moments ; and Ralph would not interrupt his reverie. At length, he again broke silence, returning, somewhat abruptly, to the subject, and saying, " Moreover, my young friend, these two letters are written in a very different spirit. The first is a mere common letter of introduction, bespeaking my good offices for a young gentleman going to see the world. It is not even written in Lord Woodhall's own hand, though signed by him, and was never calculated to ensure you more than merely the civility of an invitation to my house. The second, however, demands, in good broad terms, that I shall do whatever I can to forward your

views, with sincerity and zeal ; and, good faith ! I am willing to do it, though the terms need not have been quite so imperative. First, however, I must know what those views are."

"I will explain them in a moment, my Lord Duke," replied Ralph ; but the other cut him short, saying,

"We shall not have time at present; for I am, in reality, going out upon business of some importance. I shall be back, however, in a few hours; and the best plan will be for you to come and take up your residence here for a fortnight or so. • During that time we shall find plenty of opportunity for conversation, in the course of which I can learn all your intentions, and perhaps strike out some means of serving you. In the meantime, I will put you into the hands of my chamberlain, who will provide you with what rooms you need, and make you acquainted with the customs of the house."

Thus saying, the Duke rang a small bell

that stood upon the table, and summoned the chamberlain to his presence. Orders were cordially given for Ralph's hospitable entertainment; and, leaving him in the hands of the officer, Norfolk went out to ride.

However far the Duke himself might have unbent from his stateliness, the chamberlain remained as dignified as ever. He was perfectly civil, indeed, for he had seen, at a glance, that the young stranger was high in the favour of his lord; but he was solemn and slow, with all the rigidity of a hackneyed official, putting a certain degree of state into the slightest movement, and uttering every word in a tone of ceremony. He enquired, carefully, what number of domestics Master Ralph Woodhall would bring with him; and, finding that he was only to be accompanied by one, declared that would render the arrangement of his apartments very easy; adding, with a pompous air, that gentlemen sometimes came accompanied by as many

as twenty, which occasionally put the Duke's officers to some inconvenience.

All, however, was at length arranged: a stable was pointed out for the two horses; a small suite of rooms, at the western corner of the building, was assigned to the master and his servant, and their names were duly inscribed in the chamberlain's book.

This being completed, Ralph took his departure, and returned to the inn, where Stillington was waiting his arrival with some traces of anxiety on his face.

"Well, sir, how has it gone?" he enquired, when Ralph appeared. "Is the Duke courteous or not, this morning? for the people here tell me his mood varies a good deal, according as he has many or few people to see—mighty civil to the first who come, somewhat short to the last."

"Matters have gone better than I could have expected," replied Ralph, "thanks, I believe, to the letter which you brought me; for, till he saw that, I cannot say the Duke shewed any great urbanity."

"Ay, I was certain that would do the business," said Stilling.

"Why, I thought you did not know who it came from," observed Ralph.

"True, I did not *know*," replied the man, laughing ; "but I *guessed*. I have a rare bundle of guesses always about me, and they generally turn out tolerably right. But what is to come of it now, Master ? When shall we hear more ? I do not like things to stick by the way."

"We shall hear more very soon, I trust," replied Ralph ; "but in the meantime, Stilling, you must get ready to take up your abode with me at the Duke's house."

"Hurrah !" cried Stilling ; "that *is* progress, to have effected a lodgment on the walls already. But I won't lose a moment, sir ; for that which is quick begun, is quick ended, notwithstanding all that old women may say."

And away he went, to lead forth the horses and re-place the saddle-bags.

CHAPTER X.

"If you please, sir," said Gaunt Stilling, on the second day after their arrival in Norwich, as he stood before his young master, who was seated reading, and had hardly raised his eyes at his entrance, "may I ask you a question?"

"Certainly," replied Ralph. "What is it, Stilling?"

"Why only just this, sir," answered Stilling. "I should like to know if, before you set out, you mentioned my name to any one, or whether any one else knew that I was going in your service?"

"No one whatever, Stilling," replied

Ralph, "except myself, our friend Moräber, and Mistress Margaret Woodhall ; for I did not mention the subject to my father, as he might have imagined that I was about to launch into extravagance, and encounter expenses incompatible with my small means ; and, moreover, might have made himself uneasy during the whole period of my absence with this thought, which I should never have been able to remove from his mind, although I knew the impression to be wrong."

"Good, sir, good," said Stilling "And so, now, by your leave and permission, I will be called Stilling no longer ; but, as the old poet-man says, 'your good servant ever.' I have my own reasons, sir."

"I do not understand you," interposed Ralph. "Do you wish to change your name, or rather to take one that does not belong to you ?"

"Yes, sir, any good travelling designation," replied the young man, gaily. "I am not of the rank or manners to dub

myself Captain ; but anything else will do as well."

"As far as I am concerned, it will," rejoined Ralph ; "but do not the people of the house know your real name ?"

"No, sir, no," replied Stilling. "I have waited till to-day to announce myself ; and I know you have not betrayed me, for I was asked yesterday at supper at the third table, and begged time for consideration and preparation."

Ralph did not, at the moment, recollect that he had written the man's name, in his own hand, in the chamberlain's book, and he readily acceded to his wishes, not caring much by what name he went. Stilling fixed upon the designation of Tuckett—Jack Tuckett—and begged his master to call him so for the future ; with which Ralph promised to comply, unless memory played him an unpleasant trick, and brought back the old name when he was off his guard.

This was all settled, and, for a time,

produced no consequences. Ralph did not choose to pry into the motives of this transformation ; and, to say the truth, he was so occupied in thinking of the slow progress of his own affairs, that he soon forgot the matter altogether, and accustomed himself, during his sojourn with the Duke, to call the servant, Tuckett.

Slow progress! Oh the eager hopes of youth, how they hurry us on to disappointing conclusions! He had been five days in the house of the Duke of Norfolk. He had seen more or less of that nobleman every day, and had been treated by him with kindness and distinction ; but not a word had yet been said in regard to his views or prospects ; and Ralph's spirit fretted within him, to find the wheels move so much more slowly than he expected.

At length, one day, the Duke sent up a message to his room, importing that he was about, that morning, to set out upon a


visit to a neighbouring nobleman, at whose house the Earl of Sunderland was to meet him. He thought it might be advantageous to his young friend, he said, to be acquainted with that nobleman, and he would take him with him, if he would consent to travel without a servant, as the house would be rather crowded.

Ralph smiled when he received the message, and immediately prepared to go. Stilling—or, as we must at present call him, Jack Tuckett—seemed delighted with the arrangement, and asked permission, during his master's absence, to make an expedition of his own. His request was readily complied with, and the two parted not long after—Ralph to accompany the Duke, and the other whithersoever his fancy lay.

Nothing resulted from the interview with Lord Sunderland, whose character is too well known in history for me to dwell on the impression he produced on Ralph's mind. The young man was naturally charmed with his winning address, and

easy, unaffected manners. He had, moreover, a tone of superiority and confidence in his own opinions, which were somewhat impressive to inexperience. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, when men of great powers of mind, already forewarned of Sunderland's treacherous vacillation, yielded to the peculiar powers of fascination possessed by him, and believed him sincere and steady in his convictions, after he had been weighed a thousand times, and found wanting, that a young man like Ralph Woodhall should be deceived by his pretensions to purity and truth.

The Duke of Norfolk, however, from time to time, read a comment on the conduct of the statesman, which was of service to his young friend ; and several of the gentlemen who were present, made observations upon Sunderland's professions, or told anecdotes of his former doings, which served, in some degree, to open Ralph's eyes. The time passed very pleasantly, however. Lord Sunderland seemed to have conceived



a great friendship for the young country gentleman, and would take a morning walk with him, and talk of classic lore, and the stores of art in other lands, with eloquence and information, such as few possessed. Yet there was something unsatisfactory in the whole, which Ralph felt, without being able to detect what it was ; a want of something—probably of sincerity and frankness—which deprived his conversation of much of its charms.

At the end of four days, the Duke set out on his return, and the whole party reached Norwich rather late in the evening. Ralph's servant had not yet come back ; but Ralph was already a favourite in the household, and one of the Duke's men came up to his room, and volunteered to perform the offices of Mr. Tuckett.

"There are to be great doings to-night, sir," he said ; "it is a ball-night here. A great number of ladies and gentlemen have arrived from different parts, to stay with his Grace, since you went ; all the country

round is invited, and the Duke's carriages have gone out to bring in the company from the town. The state rooms, too, are open, where every thing is of gold or silver, even to the tongs and pokers ; so there will be a grand sight."

Ralph dressed himself as speedily as possible, in the best array that his wardrobe would afford, and, receiving directions from the man who came to assist him, as to the way towards the state apartments he had mentioned, descended without any of those emotions which vanity often produces, in even the practised in such scenes, when they expect to play a conspicuous part. His mind was set upon higher objects ; and he neither hoped nor wished to attract attention, or to win admiration, in courtly halls.

From the second floor of the house where his rooms were situated, Ralph had to descend a large oaken staircase, from which, at each landing-place, different corridors led away in four directions, to numerous suites of apartments ; and as, by

the time he went down, guests were arriving thickly, the galleries were thronged with gay groups hurrying across, or pausing for a moment to look over the balustrades at the parties entering the hall below.

Amongst the rest, Ralph stopped for an instant to gaze upon the brilliant, moving scene ; and, leaning over, bent his eyes on the landing-place just beneath. Suddenly a figure passed across, the sight of which made him start and run down with a quick step. It was gone before he reached the landing ; but, if there was any sight in the eyes of love, that figure he felt certain, was Margaret's.

He hurried on into the state apartments, where upwards of a hundred persons were already assembled, while the Duke, all affability and kindness, was standing in the third saloon, receiving his guests, and saying some courteous words to each. It was a bright and cheerful scene, and perhaps excelled in splendour the court of royalty itself ; but Ralph had no eyes for

anything but for the search he made, amongst the ever-increasing crowd, for the figure he had seen. The magnificent pictures on the walls, the beautiful statuary ranged around, (masterpieces of ancient and modern art,) the costly decorations on which the wealth and taste of several generations had been lavished, detained him not a moment.

Onward he passed, till he reached the room where the Duke had placed himself. There he paused for an instant, to salute the lord of the mansion, intending to hurry on immediately after ; but the Duke called him kindly to his side, giving him his Christian name, as a mark of familiarity, and introduced him to the Bishop, and several of the most distinguished guests. Still Ralph was anxious to escape ; but his noble patron had other business for him.

"Here, Ralph," he said, "this fair lady, to whom I present you, Hortensia, Lady Danvers, is anxious to see the bowling-green and wilderness illuminated on this

fine night. I must, alas ! remain here to receive all my coming guests, or I would be her guide myself. I cannot, however, intrust her to anyone who will supply my place with gallant courtesy, better than yourself. Madam, let me beg you to know and esteem my young friend, Ralph Woodhall, whose good qualities he himself will commend to you better than any words of mine could do."

The lady whom he addressed was young and beautiful, and looked younger even than she really was ; for the features were exceedingly small and delicately chiselled, the complexion brilliantly fair, while a world of youthful, speaking tenderness was in her eyes—a sort of beseeching look, which seldom survives a long acquaintance with the great, hardening world. She was magnificently dressed, though in a style peculiar to herself, approaching that of the early part of the last reign rather than the stiffer mode which was already beginning to pre-

vail ; but her rich brown hair, looped up in great masses with diamonds, was arranged in a fashion which probably had never found favour in any country generally ; for it required features such as her own, and a brow as beautiful as hers, to render it at all becoming. With her, the effect was picturesque and bewitching ; and, as she stood there by the Duke's side, she certainly was as lovely a creature as the eye could well behold.

Nevertheless, Ralph would have given all he possessed in the world to be free from the task of escorting her ; but that could not be. He had no excuse ready, even if any excuse could be available in such circumstances ; and, bowing low, he said, with the pardonable hypocrisy of society, that he should be delighted to be her guide. He knew not, in his ignorance of the ways of courtly life, whether he ought to offer her his arm or not ; and he hesitated ; but he saw many a gentleman and lady passing through the apartments arm-in-arm ;

and, bending his head as she took a step forward towards the door, he said, "Will you not lean on me?"

"With pleasure," she replied, taking his arm at once; and they walked on through that room and the next.

It must have been difficult for the lady not to see that her companion's thoughts were not so exclusively given to herself as she had, perhaps, a right to expect, or to avoid noticing that his eyes often wandered from her beautiful face to different parts of the halls, as if looking for something. But woman is a strange creature, and very full of varieties. Some, of irritable and all-absorbing vanity, would have felt offended, and might have shown their anger. Not so, however, Lady Danvers. What might have offended, or rather, I should say, disgusted, her more, would have been the empty compliments and overcharged affectation of gallantry which was common in that day. At all events, Ralph's demeanor had something of the charm of novelty in

it ; and she seemed to apply herself diligently to show him that she was worthy of more attention than he paid her.

For some little time she was silent ; but, at length, she said, in a low voice,

“ I think you must be looking for some one, Mr. Woodhall.”

“ Only my cousin—of whom I caught a glance upon the stairs,” replied Ralph.

“ And now you are wishing me far away,” rejoined the lady, with a smile.

“ But come ! Let us look for him before we go to the wilderness. I am quite willing to join in the chase.”

Ralph felt his rudeness, and (what, perhaps, was more to the purpose at that moment) he was convinced—for he had used his eyes well—that Margaret was not in the rooms. He had either been mistaken altogether in supposing he had seen her, or else she had gone to change her dress, which might, for aught he had remarked, have been merely a travelling costume.

He hastened then to atone, saying,

"Oh, dear no ! I will not lead you such a chase on any account ; nor must you suppose such rudeness is in my thoughts. I wish but to say two words to my cousin ; but it matters not : I shall find, I trust, another opportunity. Now, let us go to the wilderness ; this is our way."

"You are very strange," said the lady, thoughtfully. "I have given you a dozen opportunities of saying pretty things to me, and you have not taken advantage of one. I suppose there is not another man in the whole room who would have neglected any of them."

Ralph was about to put forth some apology, and try to make amends ; but Lady Danvers would not suffer him to proceed. Lifting her beautiful, soft eyes to his face, she said,

"Stop ! not a word of excuse. I like you all the better. For wits, courtiers, gallants, and fools, I have a wonderful aversion."

"But, at all events," returned Ralph,

smiling, as they descended the stone steps to the bank of the Wansum, "you must, at one time, have liked courtiers better, to choose one for your husband."

"My husband!" exclaimed the lady, with a clear, merry laugh. "I have no such incumbrance, Mr. Woodhall. I see you do not know much about me, although I know everything about you. Now I will tell you all concerning myself, which may, perhaps, cheer your task for you. The Duke called me Lady Danvers, for the best of all possible reasons, because I *am* Lady Danvers; but in my own right, and not as the appendage of any husband in Christendom. I and poor Henrietta Wentworth were in the same position—Baronesses in our own right, and great friends, too, till she went away"

"Why do you call her '*poor*' Henrietta Wentworth?" asked Ralph. "I should think, to be an independent peeress did not deserve much compassion."

"Oh, ignorant man!" cried his fair companion. "I did not imagine there was any one in the whole world who did not know that poor girl's history. I cannot tell it you fully ; for there is much therein on which I would not desire to dwell. Suffice it, that she sacrificed all to love ; rank, wealth, consideration, friends, home, country."

"I envy her," said Ralph, in a serious tone. "Methinks there could be no greater happiness on earth than the opportunity of making such a sacrifice."

"For a worthy object," added the lady, in as grave a tone as his own.

"And is he not worthy, for whom she has sacrificed all this?" demanded Ralph, eagerly.

"Not worthy of such a sacrifice," returned Lady Danvers, "except in love for her. There I believe he is perfect. Graceful, handsome, affable, and brave in the field, he is ; but I fear much he is weak, vacillating, inconsequent, and ungrateful to all but her. I speak of Monmouth."

"What! the Duke?" asked Ralph.

"The same," replied the lady; and there the conversation stopped, for a moment or two, while, passing over the bowling-green, which was surrounded by a ring of lights, as if to shine upon fairy revels on the green sward, they entered what was called the wilderness, where a number of mazy walks, illuminated by many tri-cornered lanterns, afforded ample opportunities for private meetings and whispered tales of love.

"This is exceedingly pretty," said the lady, looking around her over the scene, where the lanterns, shining through green leaves, produced the effect of a garden lighted by glow-worms.

"Yes," replied Ralph, in an absent tone. "But you said, just now, Lady Danvers, that I knew little about you, while you knew everything about me. The first was unhappily quite true. The second, I doubt not, was quite true also; yet I cannot well comprehend how anything regarding

so insignificant a person as myself, can have reached your ladyship's ears."


"Now have I a great mind," said Lady Danvers, "to punish you for all your misdeeds this night, by keeping you in darkness and mystery. I will even aggravate your suffering, by telling you that I desired the Duke to introduce you to me, and leaving you to discover the interpretation for yourself."

"Nay, nay," said Ralph, "I am sure you will not be so cruel."

As he spoke, another party, conversing in tones mingled with laughter, passed along a walk close to that which they were following, and only separated from it by a thin screen of hornbeam. The lady paused before she replied; but when the others had passed, she said,

"Well, well, I will be merciful, and spare you an unquiet night. You are the son of Mr. Robert Woodhall of the Grange, the Duke told me. I must explain. I asked him who you were as you crossed the

room ; for I thought you very handsome—of course ; and I thought you better dressed than any other man there, because you had less gold-lace and embroidery about you. However, the Duke told me, and then I knew all about you directly. My dear mother, who left me here on earth some eighteen months ago, was the early friend of your mother, her constant companion in the days of girlhood ; and she has often talked to me about her. She had her picture ever hanging in her room, and I have seen it a thousand times ; but she always said it did your mother little justice—that she was the most beautiful creature in all the world. Then my mother would tell me how yours had chosen your father against the wishes of many of her friends, and neglected high station and courtly celebrity to become the wife of a poor gentleman, on whom she had no fortune to bestow ; and how, when she died and left him, he had abandoned all the paths of worldly ambition which he had opened for



himself, and retired to his small estate with her only child. Once or twice in the year, a letter passed between your father and my mother, for they had both loved the same person, and both mourned her."

Something so touching was in her voice and manner, as she told the little tale, that Ralph, hardly knowing what he did, took her fair hand and pressed it in his own. Lady Danvers seemed not at all offended, and entered fully into his feelings towards his mother.

"I am sure I should love your father very much," she added ; "for I have read several of his letters, especially towards the last years of my own parent's life; and in them he spoke in as beautiful and touching affection of his wife and her loss, as if she had not been dead a year."

"I think you would like him," replied Ralph, "though that one deep grief, which he experienced so early, has made him very negligent of all those graces which I am

told he at one time possessed. He is now immersed in studies curious and abstruse, and heeds little besides his books."

"Well, you see," observed Lady Danvers, "I have at all events an hereditary right to your friendship ; and all I can say is, that if I can promote your views in any way, Mr. Woodhall, I shall be very happy."

"To have a right to call you friend, dear lady," replied Ralph, warmly, "is quite enough, without taxing your kindness farther. The picture you have of my mother must be, I suppose, a copy of that which my father possesses—and yet I should like to see it."

"Oh no, it is no copy," answered the lady. "She sat expressly at my mother's request, shortly after her marriage. It is very beautiful—the face is full of love, and tenderness, and self-devotion. Hers was a noble sacrifice ; and I am sure, if she had had millions to give, as well as her hand, she would not have hesitated. I can read it in her face."

"I am glad to hear you speak thus," said Ralph. "The world judges hardly of such sacrifices. Her own relations blamed and cast her off."

"The world is very foolish in its estimates," returned Lady Danvers. "Surely, happiness and estimable qualities, peace of heart and contentment, are the best wealth and jewels, the highest rank and station. Caseme in gold, and I am no better—no happier; put me on a throne, I am no wiser, no more contented; but if you give me the society of those I love, and health and competence, the riches of the world can add very little—their want take very little away. I would not be the slave of all this decoration—of the mere ornaments of the human frame or of human life—which I see the greater number of the women of this land become, for all that earth can give."

"Nor I either," said Ralph; "but yet, dear lady, wealth and station are sometimes needful, not to happiness, but to the

means of attaining that better wealth of the heart."

"Never, I should think," replied the lady.

"Let us suppose a case," said Ralph. "Imagine that a man, in other respects not ill endowed, but wanting in riches and in high rank, dares to fix his eyes upon 'some bright particular star, and hope to win it.' Suppose, even, that he has gained love for love. What chance has he of being made happy—of obtaining her he loves? Friends, relations, guardians, interpose; obstacles of every kind arise, which can only be overcome by gaining that wealth and station, the want of which is the impediment."

"Not so—not so!" exclaimed Lady Danvers, eagerly. "Let her he loves be nobly firm, and bold in affection. Let her do as your mother did, and, if there be competence, there will be happiness.—But really we must look about us. We are talk-

ing so eagerly," she said, while a warm blush fluttered over her cheek, "that people will say we are making love, and the Duke will ask me about the gardens, and I shall not be able to tell him anything. Then will his Grace have his good joke at poor me. However, Mr. Woodhall, when you like to see that picture, you can. It is at my seat in Somersetshire ; and, if I am absent when you pass that way, you have but to use my name, and the servants will shew it to you. Bid them treat you hospitably, too, for their mistress' sake. Now tell me, what is this we are coming to ?"

"It is the fish-pond—illuminated too, I see," replied Ralph. "Let us go near the edge, and look in. By day, one can see down to the marble beneath. I know not whether this light is strong enough. Yes it is. See how those gentlemen in gold and silver coats swim quietly about, as if their watery world had no strife or contention in it. They always look to me

like the prosperous and wealthy of this earth, who never appear to dream of all the strife and care and agony of body and of mind that is going on around them."

"Not so with *all* the prosperous," remarked the lady, in a tone almost reproachful: "those who are not quite so fortunate, frequently do them an injustice. They cannot see beneath the surface, and know not how often the heart which has few or no sorrows of its own, bleeds for the sorrows of others. Yet, in some degree, you are right, I believe. Prosperity may have a tendency to harden the heart. Without feeling grief or care, imagination cannot picture it distinctly, and we are in danger of forgetting in our own tranquillity the sorrows and the pangs which are not apparent to the eye."

They continued for a moment or two gazing into the clear water, without noticing the groups that passed by. At length, however, a voice, familiar to Ralph's ear,

said, loud enough to be audible, "Yes, very lover-like indeed! Do not disturb them."

Ralph started; but the speaker was already going down one of the little alleys of the wilderness.

"Did you hear that?" interrogated Lady Danvers, looking up with a blush and a smile. "It is time for us to go back, I think—not that I ever trouble myself much about people's wrong constructions; but it is as well not to give them cause for such observations."

Charming as she was, and kind, Ralph was very willing to return. As they went, she gave him a frank invitation to visit her, either in London or the country, adding, with a laugh, "I have always some old aunt or ancient cousin of the house, staying with me, so as to escape scandal, Mr. Woodhall; and remember, if I can at any time serve you—and perhaps I *may* be able—all the little influence I possess

may be commanded by the son of my dear mother's friend."

Ralph thanked her warmly, eagerly; and they paced on through the mazy walks towards the house, with slower steps, perhaps, than Ralph would have taken had he been alone.

CHAPTER XI.

AN old, white-haired man, of distinguished mien, was standing by the Duke of Norfolk ; and the latter said, with a good-humoured smile, "You requested me, my lord, to take care of his fortunes. Now, I have introduced him this night to the most beautiful, the most wealthy, and the most romantic young lady in the room, who knew something of his family, and seemed exceedingly interested in his fate. To make the matter more complete, I have sent them to take a walk together through the wilderness, and by the bank of the river. Now I look upon it as a hundred chances to one, that

they come back desperately in love with each other ; for, as the dramatist has it, 'they have changed eyes already.' The lady has no one to control her ; and, if I judge her rightly, she will one day or other bestow hand and fortune upon some poor gentleman of no rank, just to show the world how completely she despises the gifts the Gods have given her."

"I am delighted, my lord Duke," answered the other ; "and trust, with all my heart, your anticipations may be fulfilled. Pray, what is the lady's name ?"

"Hortensia, Baroness Danvers," replied the Duke. "She was once a great friend of poor Henrietta Wentworth, though somewhat more strict in her notions of propriety. I remember her weeping bitterly when told that Lady Wentworth had followed Monmouth. Before that, she would not believe any of the tales that were current. She is a good girl, but a fanciful little enthusiast."

Only two persons, besides Lord Woodhall

(with whom his Grace was conversing) were near enough to the Duke to hear his words. One was a very beautiful girl, who turned red and white alternately, as the Duke spoke ; and the other was a young gentleman of no prepossessing mien, though the features of his face were generally good. He had a haggard and suspicious expression of countenance.

While the Duke was concluding what he had to say of Lady Danvers, the young man addressed his fair companion, using a good number of the ribald expletives of the day, not very suitable to the ears of a lady.

“Demme, Margaret,” he said, “that would never suit your brother, to have Master Ralph carry off the rich Baroness. Gad zounds ! I saw Henry fluttering round her in London, like a blue and pink pigeon ; and depend upon it he’ll suffer no rivalry from a fellow like Ralph. He’ll pink the book-worm in a minute, if there is any of that nonsense.”

Margaret turned away with a look of

disgust, but with a very pale cheek ; and her father presented her to the Duke, who received her with a graceful mingling of gallantry and respect. Lord Woodhall then introduced his kinsman, Mr. Robert Woodhall, son of the late Lord Coldenham, adding, with a well-satisfied look, "Yousee, my noble friend, that I have taken the liberty, in making this little *detour* on my road to London, to cast a number of my relations on your hospitality. My son Henry I think you have seen to-night."

"When monarchs make progresses," replied the Duke, with a smile, "they must always be attended by their suite. I saw your son half an hour ago, and, if our friend Ralph would but return with his fair lady, we would have a family dance in the ball-room. Let me offer you my arm, Mistress Margaret. I think all the guests have arrived by this time."

When they reached the ball-room, they found Margaret's brother already engaged in the dance ; and the Duke and his party

paused for some five or ten minutes, gazing upon the scene, while different groups of guests came forward, said a few words, and passed on. Margaret's eyes, however, were but little upon the gay sight before her, and very frequently turned to the door by which they had entered, with an anxious and eager glance. But Ralph did not appear ; and, at length, her cousin asked her to join in the dance with him. She could not refuse ; and, taking their places, they were proceeding with one of the courtly dances of that day—Margaret, with a pale cheek and inattentive mind, and Robert Woodhall, with no great grace, but with some agility and skill—when two persons entered the room by the door exactly opposite to the dancers, and Lady Danvers, in all the splendour of her beauty, leaning listlessly on the arm of Ralph Woodhall, was before the eyes of Margaret. *

At the same moment, Ralph saw her dancing with Robert Woodhall ; and, in

spite of all he could do to command himself, his cheek grew fiery red. Margaret was fatigued with her long journey. She had been greatly agitated by the speech which she had overheard from the lips of the Duke of Norfolk. She was one of those very few persons who undervalue themselves; and when she saw the resplendent beauty of Hortensia Danvers, arrayed and decorated by all that dress could do to heighten its effect, a chilly feeling of all the perils to which her love and happiness were to be exposed, took possession of her. Her head became giddy; the objects swam before her eyes; her heart refused to beat; and she sank fainting on the floor.

The music was instantly stopped; a little crowd gathered round; and Ralph, letting Lady Danvers's arm drop from his own, sprang forward to render assistance. In so doing, he came in contact with Robert Woodhall, who turned sharply upon ~~him~~, exclaiming—

“Demme, stand back, sir! You are

impertinent ! Who asked you to meddle ?”

Ralph made no reply whatever, but took him by the collar with one hand, and forcibly drew him back into the centre of the room. Then, taking his place, he bent anxiously over Margaret, by whom her brother Henry was already standing.

The Duke of Norfolk, who had observed the whole scene, advanced towards the group gathered round Margaret, without, however, mingling with it. His voice was now heard, exclaiming,

“Carry the young lady out to her own room ! She is only fainting with the heat, and will soon be better.”

“Help me to carry her, Ralph,” said Henry Woodhall, applying himself at once to the companion of his youth, rather than to his cousin Robert.

They raised her in their arms and bore her out, Lord Woodhall following, and saying to those around,

“She has only fainted—she has only

fainted. The girl is not subject to such freaks, but that room was very hot. Pray do not follow. None of you! None of you! We shall bring her to herself very soon."

Henry and Ralph carried their fair burthen into an ante-room at some distance from the reception rooms, while an attendant ran away to call Margaret's own woman to her assistance ; and, as soon as they had placed her in a chair, Lord Woodhall said, " Now leave us, boys—leave us. I will soon bring her to herself. It is not the first time I have seen a woman faint."

Henry obeyed his father's directions at once ; but Ralph lingered for a moment, saying to the old nobleman, " Can I not render any assistance, my lord ?"

" Only if you can contrive to unlace this stomacher, my dear boy," replied Lord Woodhall, who had been fumbling, apparently without much success, at the various lacings which went to complicate a lady's dress in those days. " Margaret would

not mind, I am sure ; you have been always like a brother to her."

Ralph hastened to obey ; and, with hands which trembled with many emotions, and associations, dear, but agitating, soon unfastened Margaret's dress, and gave her fair bosom freer play.

As he did so, the beautiful girl opened her eyes for a moment, fixing them with a look of thoughtful anxiety upon his face, and raised her hand faintly, so that it lay upon his. Then, however, came the maid ; and, as he was once more desired by the old lord to leave him and his daughter alone, the young man obeyed—reluctantly, it must be owned, and not without more than one glance turned towards her he was leaving. She was pale and insensible still, having fallen back in a fainting fit again, almost as soon as she had opened her eyes ; but the momentary look she had given him was not to be forgotten, and it was with regret that he quitted the room.

Instead of returning to the state apart-

ments at once, Ralph wandered up and down the corridor for some minutes ; but at length Lord Woodhall came forth with the welcome intelligence that Margaret had fully recovered ; and, with him, Ralph returned to the ball-room.

In the mean time, he had formed the subject of conversation in two of the different groups which that room contained. At one part, Robert Woodhall was speaking eagerly with one or two gentlemen who surrounded him, saying "He insulted me, sir, he insulted me ; and he shall give me an apology, or I will know the reason why."

These words were overheard by the Duke of Norfolk, who had just returned from bidding his guests go on with their dancing, assuring them that the little confusion had only been occasioned by a lady fainting from the heat, who would soon be well again, and ordering more windows to be opened to admit the fresh air. He immediately turned somewhat sharply towards

Robert Woodhall, saying, "I beg your pardon, young gentleman. He did not insult you. You insulted *him*. He shall make you no apology, if he would remain my friend. Whether he will be content without an apology from *you*, must rest with himself; I shall not interfere."

At the other side of the room, conversation of a different character was going on between the son of Lord Woodhall and the fair Lady Danvers. She had remained, after Ralph left her, at the same spot, watching his proceedings, if the truth must be told, with some interest, and suspecting the truth though not convinced of it. Henry Woodhall was an old acquaintance, but in her eyes nothing more; and when he approached her, as soon as he re-entered the ball-room, she enquired "How is your sister?"

It was hypocrisy, I must needs admit; for had the question which sprang to her lips been uttered, it would have been "Where is your cousin?"

"Oh, she is getting better, most beautiful Lady Danvers," replied Henry Woodhall, lightly. "Ladies will faint, you know."

"Why, your cousin Ralph seems to take a deeper interest in her than you do," rejoined the lady, in truth, seeking to make no mischief, but moved by a curiosity which perhaps had its source in some deeper motive.

"Oh, they have been all their childhood together," returned Henry Woodhall. "Ralph is as much her brother in all our eyes as I am."

"I almost fancied it was something more than brotherly love," observed Hortensia, in a low voice.

"Pooh! nothing of the kind," said Henry Woodhall, in his gay, light tone. "Margaret is to be married to my cousin Robert, by the act in that case made and provided for

'Uniting lands and money
In the holy estate of matrimony.'

But now tell me, beautiful lady," he continued ; "will you dance with me?"

"Poor girl!" exclaimed Lady Danvers, with a sigh, not heeding his request.

"Why do you say 'poor girl'?" asked Henry Woodhall.

"Because she ought to be a poor girl to marry your cousin Robert," replied Lady Danvers, bluntly, "and because she will be a poor girl if she does marry him."

"She will assuredly marry him," declared Henry. "These things always come to pass when the old people arrange them ; and they do very well after all. You would be obliged to marry me, if your great great grandfather had arranged it with my great great grandmother."

"That I would not," affirmed Lady Danvers, "if all our ancestors had arranged it from Adam downwards."

"Well, never mind that," rejoined Henry, laughing ; "nobody asks you. The question at present is, will you dance with me?"

"Then the answer is, no—I will not,"

protested Lady Danvers. "I shall not dance to-night."

"Then I shall look for some one else," said Henry, as, turning gaily away, he left her.

Lady Danvers remained in the same place for a moment or two, musing. She asked herself, if there was any love between Ralph and Margaret. The heightened colour in the former's cheek, when his eyes fell upon his fair cousin, she had not remarked; but she had seen the eager gaze which Margaret fixed, first upon him, and then upon herself, and the impetuous haste with which he had flown to her aid when she fainted. She argued, however, thus : "Perhaps the sight of a relation, so kind and so noble in his feelings, at the moment when she was dancing with a man whom she could not love, forced upon her by her relations, may have excited emotions deep enough to overpower her. Perhaps Ralph's eagerness was all very natural and right. Nay, it *was* natural and right in one brought

up with the poor girl in fraternal affection, such as Henry Woodhall has described. Perhaps—”

But there was no end of perhapses. Lady Danvers was willing to believe that love existed between the two, and *did* believe it ; and yet she asked herself, when her musing came to an end, “ What matters it to me, whether he loves her or not ? ”

Had the fair baroness been seeing sights and dreaming dreams ? It might be so ; and certain it is that, amongst the sweetest of all those dreams which flit deceptively before man's eyes, from the cradle to the grave, are those which are so faint and intangible that we are ourselves unconscious of their passing till they have passed.

However that may be, and whatever silent streams of that peculiar current of the mind which runs between thought and feeling, partaking, like the mingled waters of the Rhine and Maine, of the distinct colouring of each, had been flowing

through her brain, certain it is, that she hung about in the ball-room, now in one place, now in another, avoiding all long conversation with any one, till Ralph made his appearance again, and that soon after, they were talking together as before. Her first questions were for Margaret; but Ralph had by this time recovered full command over himself, and knew how dangerous it might be to all his hopes to suffer the feelings of his heart to appear. He replied, therefore, in as cool a tone of indifference as he could assume; and exerted himself during the rest of the evening to seem at ease and unconcerned.

Margaret did not re-appear. Robert Woodhall also quitted the ball-room, and was seen in it no more; but Henry continued dancing and talking, and more than once mingled gaily and good-humouredly in conversation with his cousin Ralph and the young Baroness, seeming just as well pleased with the intimacy which had so suddenly sprung up between

them as, if he had taken part in introducing them to each other.

Lord Woodhall was well pleased also. He was not a man of very quick perceptions—no great schemer or arranger of plans ; and, although he would have been very willing to see his son marry any white woman on earth with the fortune of Lady Danvers, it had never struck him that the alliance was worth seeking, till the notion was propounded to him, as already arranged by the Duke of Norfolk. Neither did he feel any inclination to meddle with it after finding it thus settled to his hand. All he thought was, that Ralph was a very lucky fellow in having such an opportunity afforded him. Such, indeed, were the feelings of several personages on the scene.

Supper was now announced, and the guests sat down to one of the most splendid entertainments of the period. I need not pause to give any account of the supper, nor to tell how the

guests were served on massive plate of silver gilt, nor how they drank out of goblets of pure gold. Is it not written in the book of chronicles of the house of Howard? and do we not know that even the pokers, the tongs, the shovels, and the fenders, of the Palace of Norwich were of solid silver?

Before the evening meal was completely ended, a servant bent over Henry Woodhall's chair, and whispered something in his ear. That gentleman remained at table a few minutes longer; but, as soon as he could find a good opportunity, he slipped away and did not return.

Not long after, the Duke and his friends rose from supper, and dancing recommenced, going on till night had far waned. In common courtesy, Ralph asked his fair companion of the evening to tread a measure with him; and her answer was conveyed in a different tone from that which she had given to Henry Woodhall.

"I would with pleasure," she replied, "for I am fond of dancing ; but I have refused several to-night, and amongst the rest your cousin Henry."

"Oh, Henry would not mind," rejoined Ralph. "He is hot in temper, but kind and good-humoured. I will take the responsibility upon myself."

"No," returned Lady Danvers. "I said distinctly that I should not dance this evening, and therefore I will not. See what it is," she continued in a gayer tone, "to neglect opportunity. If you had asked me while we were walking together in the wilderness, I would have danced with you at once, and then might have refused all other comers at my own will and pleasure. But now that I have declared my intention not to dance at all, I must not offend some very worthy people by dancing with any one."

"Well, if you do not dance, will you walk ?" asked Ralph. "The air upon the

terrace will be sweet and cool. Many people are walking there also."

"Be it so," replied Lady Danvers, with a smile. "The fresh air will do me good, for my head feels hot, and my brain is somewhat giddy with the multitude of people crammed into the same room. There is nothing so strange as what is called pleasure. All who are here are seeking it in things where it does not live; nay more, are trying to extract it from materials distasteful to most of them. What care they for dancing? What care they for the crowded ball-room? What care they for all the labour and trouble of dressing themselves forth for this grand occasion? It is always something else they are seeking, than that which they pretend to be enjoying. Strange alchemy of the human mind, which changes lead into gold, and from things that are fatiguing, hurtful, or annoying, produces what is called pleasure, if not happiness! One dances

to shew a fine form or graceful teaching : not for any enjoyment of the dance. Another comes here to display a gown finer than her neighbour's. A third, who would rather have been in bed, comes to say that she was at the great ball—or perhaps," she added, laughing, "to prevent others from saying that she was not. I am beginning to think that everything is hypocrisy in this world, Mr. Woodhall. Is it not so ?"

"God forbid !" answered Ralph, and quietly led her on to the terrace, where they wandered about for a few minutes. They soon, however, found their way down to the banks of the Wansum again, and walked musingly along, gazing upon the lights reflected in the water. Sometimes they talked together—sometimes they mused ; but Lady Danvers leaned all the while upon his arm ; and certainly, to the eyes of those who passed them, they seemed more like a pair of lovers, happy in each

other's affection, than two persons who had met that night for the first time.

At length the sounds of departure, warned them to return; and, as they separated Hortensia said, "We shall meet again to-morrow."

CHAPTER XII.

IN a room, not very large, on the upper floor but one of the Duke of Norfolk's palace in Norwich, sat Robert Woodhall by the side of a table on which were placed two large wax tapers. His hat had been thrown upon the ground, at some distance ; his sword and sword-belt lay upon the table ; his head was bent forward, as he reclined in the chair, and his left foot was thrown listlessly over the right.

I have described his features as good, though the expression of his face was unprepossessing ; and there was now on it a thoughtful look, slightly varying from time

to time, as if he were revolving some subject of great interest, or laying out some plan on which much depended. Now, a frown would gather on his brow, and then the frown would be chased by a smile, and again the smile would give place to a scornful curl of the lip, as if he were mentally sneering at some one present to his thoughts.

“ Ay, Master Ralph !” he exclaimed between his teeth. “ We will fit you with something. Then again, he fell into silence. A moment or two after, he muttered in the same tone, “ Harry’s a fool ! He’s as hot as pepper, though, when put up ; and one can make something of that, perhaps.”

Once more, a moment or two passed without his saying anything, and then came the words, “ Yes, it must be that way. He has been tampering with Margaret’s heart, and now is half won away from her by this bright Hortensia. Damme, it will be my game to let him win the young

Baroness, and make sure of Mistress Margaret myself. She is very handsome—would shew well ; and then, her mother's fortune—that is all her own at once. No, zounds, I will not play that game ; for though I might win the stakes, yet he would carry off more still ; and by Jove he shall not triumph ! My mother told me to avoid him through life ; for, if a struggle came between us, he might throw me—that was her word. Now, we have run against each other, and the struggle must come. But we will see, mother mine, which will throw the other. He may have the strength, but I have the trick.—What the fiend can be keeping this lad ? He has had time enough to learn the whole history of everybody in the house.”

Once more, he relapsed into silence ; but if he were waiting for any one, he had full a quarter-of-an-hour more to remain in expectation. At the end of that time, a tall, powerful, but agile fellow, in the garb of a servant, entered the room, and, with a sort

of tip-toe, sliding, and noiseless step, approached the back of the gentleman's chair. There, standing, he spoke over his shoulder, saying, "I have plenty of news for you, sir."

"You have had time enough to get it," observed Robert Woodhall, sharply. "Speak out, and be quick."

"This cousin of yours is not here alone, as you thought, sir," said the man. "He has got a servant with him ; and who do you think that servant is ?"

"Nay, I know not, and what matters it ?" replied his master ; "though where the beggarly animal picked up a servant, or got money to keep him, I cannot divine."

"He is none other, sir, but our old friend, Gaunt Stilling," said the servant ; by those few words causing his young master to start upon his feet with a look of vindictive fierceness, which would have done honour to a tragedy villain.

The next instant, however, he sat down again with a laugh, saying,

“That is impossible, you fool. That scoundrel, Stilling, went away with my pretty Kate, to take her out of my reach. I will find her, though. I heard the whole plan, and set three men to belabour him on the road, and bring her back. They failed in the latter ; but they succeeded in the former part of the business—at least, they swore so ; and, if they cheated me, I will trounce them. It is impossible, I tell you. The men *did* overtake him, and one of them got a sharp poke in the shoulder from a companion of his. I saw the wound myself ; and it was not such a scratch as a man might give himself for the sake of a little bloody evidence to support a cursed lie. What you tell me is impossible, I say.”

“It is quite true, sir,” persisted the man, in a soft and insinuating tone. “I will tell you all about it ; but let me just say, in the mean time, sir, that if you had but condescended to trust me in the matter of

the young lady, Mistress Kate, I would have had her back for you, and snug in the little cottage, within a single day."

"I never trust anybody too much," replied Robert Woodhall, in a surly tone. "How the devil did you know anything about the cottage?"

"Oh, I know everything that goes on, sir," answered the servant, with a slight touch of self-sufficient confidence in his tone. "I believe that you would find it better to trust one than many."

"Come, come, leave your preaching," cried Robert Woodhall, interrupting him sharply. "I do not desire to be schooled by such as you. You say the tale you tell me is true. I say it is impossible. Now, make those two meet."

"Why, sir, you have been misinformed," replied the man. "Gaunt did *not* go with his sister; but the old man did. Gaunt staid to go along as servant with your poor cousin Ralph, and it was Mr. Woodhall who slit Jack Naseby's arm. They had

not much time to belabour Master Gaunt, either ; for they took to their heels and ran, as soon as his master came to his rescue. '


" Gaunt Stilling turned his servant ? " ejaculated Robert Woodhall, in a tone of doubt and surprise. " I cannot believe it, Roger. He is as proud as a prince, damme. He would be no man's servant."

" Oh, there are ways of taming pride, sir," answered the man, " it would not surprise me if you were to find that Master Ralph had found means to tame the pride of both brother and sister."

" What is it you mean ? " demanded his master, sternly " Zounds, sir, do not trifle with me, or you shall suffer for it. Give me some connected account at once. Tell me what you have heard, and as you heard it."

" Well, sir,—well," replied Roger. " I have both seen and heard. But—to give you a connected account, as you say—after I left you, I went into the still-room ; and

pretended to have a defluxion which required some herb tea. I soon got into conversation with the still-room maid, and then went with her to talk with the young ladies of the third table. I there heard that Mr. Ralph Woodhall had a servant with him who called himself Jack Tuckett ; and that the said Jack had gone, or been sent by his master, on some expedition on horseback, four or five days ago. Now, I think I know every man's name within forty miles of Coldenham tolerably well ; but I did not recollect such a person as Jack Tuckett amongst all my acquaintance. It sounds like a false name, too, sir ; and so I determined I would go away to the Duke's chamberlain, and find out more. So, when I got to the chamberlain's office, I took off my hat and bowed low, and the old gentleman said, with a grand air, 'What do you want, my man ?' To which I replied, humbly, below my breath, 'My master ordered me to see that his name was rightly put down in the books, for there



are more gentlemen than one who may be marked R. Woodhall.”’

“Come, be not so particular,” cried his master, whose oaths and expletives shall be omitted for the future, or supplied by the reader’s imagination, rather than by my pen. “Come to the point, sir.”

“Well, sir, the point was that I saw the books,” pursued the worthy Roger, “and there was written ‘Mr. Ralph Woodhall, and Gaunt Stilling, his man,’ with date and designation.”

“It is impossible!” cried Robert Woodhall, in a tone of doubt rather than negation. Why, but a few days ago, he was bearding my mother like a lion—and it needs no less to beard her ; and now he is a servant to this poor, miserable cousin of mine, who has hardly money enough to keep himself in clean linen.”

“Well, sir, I was surprised too,” resumed the man, “though it must be a tough joke that surprises me ; but, just as I was crossing the stable yard, who should I see

but Gaunt Stilling himself, getting off that very good brown horse he rides, and leading him right into the stable. It was dark enough there, and I kept out of the way ; but he caught sight of me ; and, all the men servants being busy in the house, he hallooed to me, ' Good Friend, just hold my beast a minute, while I go in and get a lantern to look for the rack-comb and the brushes.' But I answered in the voice of a blunderbore, ' I'm no servant of the house. Hold your beast yourself.' He then gave me a blessing, tied his horse to the manger, best way he could, and away for a light. Then it just came across me that I might find something out by a little feeling. So I goes into the stable, missed a kick from a skittish mare, and, creeping up by the side of the new come beast, who was as dull as a long journey could make him, I ran my hand over the saddle and the t'other things, where I found a pair of bags with padlocks on them, which there was no time to pick, and I found two horse-pistols

at the saddle-bow, out of which it was not worth while to take the bullets ; and I found a horseman's cloak—good broad-cloth enough it seemed by the feel—but it would not do to take it bodily, for people ask after their cloaks sometimes. I could not help feeling it, however, for it was so soft and good—ten times as soft as my lady gives her people ;—and so I felt it here, and felt it there, till I felt something crackle like paper. ‘ Here’s a pocket,’ said I ; and I soon found it ; and, gently putting in my hand, I found these papers which I have brought to you.”

Robert Woodhall took them, and looked at the first, which was a rather crumpled document, written on coarse paper, and seemingly a bill. He threw it down on the floor, with a contemptuous look, which the servant immediately remarked and commented on.

“ The next is more to the purpose, sir,” he said.

“ What, then you have examined them ?”

exclaimed his master, turning sharply upon him.

But Master Roger was not to be daunted easily ; and he replied, with the utmost coolness—

“Certainly, sir. I could not tell that there might not be something immoral or irreligious in them, and I could not venture to bring you ribaldry.”

His master laughed coarsely, and turned the paper, which was an open letter, till he could see the address. It was written in a very tolerable female hand, and was in effect.—

“To MASTER R. WOODHALL,

“These from—”

There the writer seemed to have been interrupted, for the writing broke short off.

Without ceremony, Robert Woodhall began to unfold the letter ; but his servant observed, in a quiet tone—

"I do not know, sir, whether it is for Mr. Ralph or you. That is a question. There is nothing in the letter to show."

"What, then, you have read it, you infernal scoundrel?" exclaimed his master.

"Certainly, sir," replied the man; "every word."

"Then by Jove I'll—" cried Robert, with an angry look; but there he stopped, and, spreading out the sheet, read as follows:—

"I am here in bondage, dearest love. If you do but love me half as much as you have sworn, come and deliver me. Neither my father nor my brother know all, or nearly all; but you know that the truth cannot long be concealed. I am ready to fly with you, as you used to ask me, to the world's end: only come—and come as fast as possible. There is nothing to stop us here. Come, then, to your unhappy

"KATE STILLING."

The place from which the letter was dated was a small town in Dorsetshire, and the date itself was three days before.

Robert Woodhall smiled as he mused over these few lines ; and then he turned to the address again, and seemed to consider it attentively, muttering—

“ Master R. Woodhall !”

“ You see, sir,” said his servant, “ one cannot tell whether it is for you or your cousin Master Ralph.”

“ What the devil do you mean ?” cried his master, fixing his eyes eagerly upon him.

“ Why, simply, sir,” replied the man, “ that it would be best to settle that point ; as, which ever it may happen to belong to, it would make a desperate good handle against him if it fell into the hands of the other.”

“ I think I understand you, Roger,” said his master, in a much more placable tone ; “ but Ralph does not even know my fair Kate.”

"We cannot tell that, sir," answered the servant; "he was over at Coldenham lately."

"Only one day," said Robert, "and soon got his answer from my mother."

"He was in the church with old Stilling, and in old Stilling's house," continued the man; "that I know for sure."

"Was he?" exclaimed Robert, in a tone of much surprise; but, after a moment's thought, he added, "Ay, ay, to hire this young vagabond for a servant. But I understand what you mean, and, perhaps, may act upon it."

"Only be so good as to remember, sir," observed Roger, "that the note was brought by his own servant over here, after being sent away, no one knows where, for several days; and the letter R may stand for Ralph as well as Robert—or Roger either, for that matter."


His master laughed.

"Would you make me jealous of Kate?" he asked. "No, no, Roger. I understand

all this clearly. Gaunt Stilling has gone over to see her, while his master was absent with the Duke. He has caught her writing this letter, and brought it away by force. Do you not see how the address breaks off? Perhaps he wished to make use of it against me, when he found occasion; for my lady-mother threatened me highly if I continued to 'persecute' these people, as she called it. Luckily the letter fell into good hands."

"Do you not think, sir, that those hands deserve some little lining?" asked the man, with a grin.

"They do, they do," replied Robert. "I am marvellously poor, just now; but there is a grinea for you. You shall have more some day soon, if you continue to serve me as well. Now go, and contrive to get my cousin Hal to come and speak with me as soon as possible. This letter, perhaps, may serve me much in one way; but I have other matters in hand which will need quick attention."



The man bowed low, and retired ; but he expressed no thanks for the present he had received ; and when he had reached the other side of the door, he tossed up the piece of coin, with a contemptuous air, ejaculating —

“ A guinea !”

CHAPTER XIII

"WELL, Robert, what is your important business?" demanded Henry Woodhall, entering his cousin's room, with a look of haste and impatience. "Be quick; for I want to return to the ball."

"The ball will be over before we have done, Henry," replied his cousin, in a grave and emphatic tone. "I have several things to say to you of importance."

"In the way of homily?" asked Henry Woodhall, laughing. "Come, then, put off your solemnity, Bob, and let us hear what they are."

Thus saying, he threw himself into a chair, and his cousin replied—

“Some things I have to say affect myself alone ; some affect you and me ; some affect you only.”

“First, second, and to conclude !” exclaimed the gay young-man. “Why, what is all this? How comes it that my rattle-pated, dissolute, latitudinarian cousin Robert, has, all of a sudden, become metamorphosed into a parson? Where are your demmes and your zoundses? Where are your remarkable oaths, and your satin-embroidery blasphemy? Why, Robert, you must be in love, or have taken physic, or have had the colic, or the heart-ache. They tell me that powdered unicorn’s horn is a sovereign thing for purging the brain of melancholic humours, and that a few grains of mummy, taken in goat’s whey, will clear the liver of black bile. Let me commend them to your consideration.”

“All very well laughing, Hal,” returned

Robert ; "but this is no laughing matter, by—"

"Come, come, there's an oath," cried his cousin ; "the patient is getting better. Well, if we are not to laugh, what are we to cry about ?"

"About being made fools of by a raw Cambridge student," replied his cousin bitterly ; "about being cheated—deceived—betrayed ; about having all your father's plans, and my mother's, overthrown—about your losing the hand of a rich and beautiful heiress, and my losing my future wife's heart."

"Well-a-day, well-a-day !" cried Henry Woodhall ; "this is a serious matter. But let us hear the particulars. Imprimis, about your future wife's heart—by which I suppose you mean the heart, or muscular pin-cushion, of my sister Margaret. But first let me observe, Bob, before you proceed, that Maggy is not quite certainly your future wife. There is many a slip

between the cup and the lip, Robert ; and that matter is not quite settled yet."

"Quite settled between your father and my mother," observed Robert Woodhall ; "and quite settled as far as *I* am concerned. With regard to Margaret, the matter may be different ; for I am certain that this mean, pitiful fellow, Ralph, has been trifling with her affections, and has won them too."

"Awkward for you !" rejoined his cousin ; "and one reason the more for my saying, this matter is not settled between you and Maggy. I tell you fairly, Robert, I will have a say in anything wherein she is concerned ; and you shall not have her hand, unless, between this and then, you show yourself more worthy of her."

"How will you prevent it ?" asked Robert Woodhall, in a sharp, almost fierce, tone.

"By running you through the liver, if need be," answered Henry Woodhall. "I tell you, Robert, that as you two stand just

now—you with your vices, and Ralph with his poverty—I would rather see him Margaret's husband than you."

Robert Woodhall fixed his eyes full upon his cousin's face, and contemplated him for a moment or two in silence, while a dark, malignant smile gradually came upon his lip. "You love hypocrites, I think, Henry?" he said, at length.

"No, I hate them," returned the other, sharply.

"You cannot say that I have any hypocrisy," rejoined his cousin. "All that I do, be it bad or good, is open—in the face of day. I am frank and bold, at least. But are you sure that this young lad on whom you pin your faith, has not learned hypocrisy at Cambridge, as well as Greek and Latin? Are you sure that his heart is not as mercenary as a money-lender's; that his conduct is not as foul and corrupt as a street prostitute's; that his hypocrisy is not as great as a non-juring preacher's?"

"Pooh, pooh!" ejaculated Henry Wood-

hall. "I have known him from infancy ; we have been boys and grown up men together. We have been like brothers ; and his thoughts are as common to me as to himself."

Still that same dark smile hung upon the lips of Robert Woodhall as he listened. Something triumphant was in it—a sort of cool self-confidence, which conveyed, even before he spoke, the idea that he possessed the means of overthrowing all the arguments opposed to him, in a moment.

"Well," he said, "let us look a little at Mr. Ralph's real conduct, and see whether it be such as you quite approve. Men have singular opinions on these subjects. Your own are somewhat curious, and perhaps you may admire all this. First, taking advantage of your father's hospitality and kindness, he makes love to Margaret, and wins her heart ; then—"

"Stay, stay," interrupted his cousin ; "of that we have no proof but your own jealousy ;

and if there be anything between them, it is more than probable that they have mutually grown up to love each other ; and then some casual word, or accidental circumstance, has betrayed the secret of each breast to the other. I cannot blame him, Robert. Margaret is a little angel ; and any man might well love her. But still, I say, we have no proof of this but your jealousy."

"My jealousy, Henry !" echoed Robert with a sneer, which he could not repress, though it injured his own cause. "I have no jealousy, good cousin. I am not in the predicament. However, even were it so, that is a matter very easily settled. Ask Margaret herself. Press her closely, and either by her looks or words you will come at the truth. But, for the moment, let us suppose that it is so. I would not blame him either, were there any real love in the case ; for though I do not know much of the heroic passion, yet I have heard that it sometimes drives men mad. But if

there has been no real love on his part— if he has been moved only by mercenary motives—if he has been ready, at any moment, to sacrifice her when he saw the prospect of greater fortune than her own—if, directly he has seen this young Baroness Danvers, he has cast off all thought of Margaret, and paraded their intimacy openly, in order that the poor girl might be satisfied at once of his treachery—if he has pursued Lady Danvers the more eagerly because the world gave out that you were to have her hand; would you think this honest, honourable, kind, in your generous, excellent cousin Ralph?”

“No, no!” replied Henry Woodhall; “I should think it base, pitiful, mean, deserving instant chastisement. As to the matter with Hortensia Danvers, I care not one straw. Let him win her and wear her, if he will. I never thought of her—never thought of marriage at all—never shall, probably, till I find my moustachio

turning gray, or have got the gout in my right foot. Then is the time for matrimony and a warm dressing gown ; but with Margaret he shall not trifle ; and if he do, he shall answer for it. On this subject, I will make full enquiry from the dear girl herself. I shall know in a moment, for I have been well accustomed to read her looks. It cannot be done to-night, however, for she is gone to rest. —Have you aught else to say ?”

“ Nothing that I hold of very much importance,” answered Robert. “ Two things, however, may as well be mentioned. First, he insulted me grossly, when I was endeavouring to aid your sister, after she fainted.”

“ That is your own affair,” said Henry Woodhall ; “ you can send him your cartel, and that is soon settled.”

“ You are mistaken,” rejoined Robert, somewhat gloomily. “ The Duke of Norfolk has laid me under an obligation to for-

bear, and given me to understand that he will have his eye continually upon me."

"Humph!" ejaculated Henry Woodhall, with a slight accent of contempt, for, to say truth, he did not hold his cousin's courage very highly. "What is number two?"

"It is a mere nothing in my eyes," answered Robert, smarting a little from his cousin's tone; "and doubtless you will think nothing of it either; for your sanctified men are abundant in charity to peccadilloes of this kind, especially when they are committed by themselves or their near relations. It is only this—that, while making love to Margaret, and doubtless vowing his whole heart to her, he was amusing himself in another manner with a country girl in the neighbourhood. Nay, do not look contemptuous and unbelieving; of this I have the proof in my own hands. Nay, more; since he has been here, as it would seem the young lady is in a difficult position, he

has sent his own servant over to see her, and bring him news of her state."

"Why, he has no servant," observed Henry Woodhall. "He went away without one. I heard this at the Grange; for I thought to offer him my own lad Brown, that he might appear the better here."

"True, quite true," rejoined his cousin, with a laugh; "he kept the matter very quiet, for he would not have his father know of the politic arrangement. Oh, he is the most frank and candid of men! The way he managed was this: he made compensation for the sister's ruin by taking the brother into his high and mighty service. Other potentates and lordly men have done the same. Then, to conceal the transaction, he made the lad join him on the road, and uses him now as the go-between of himself and the sister."

"And can you prove all this?" asked Henry Woodhall, in a grave tone.

"Every word of it, step by step," re-

plied Robert ; " but I attach no importance to it."

" I do," rejoined Henry, sternly. " I must hear the proofs."

" Good!" exclaimed Robert; and rising, he opened the door, exclaiming, " Roger, see if you can find some servant of the Duke of Norfolk, and ask him to come hither for a moment. Any one will do."

He then closed the door, seated himself, and remained silent, internally enjoying the varied, but all painful emotions which sent their traces like cloud-shadows over the face of his nobler cousin. There was something in the mental torture which he had inflicted, that pleased him well; for Henry had galled him often, and now he had his revenge.

At length, the door of the room opened, and one of the Duke's servants was introduced, with a look of some surprise and curiosity.

" You sent for me, gentlemen," he said; " how can I serve you?"

"I only wish to ask you a question or two," said Robert Woodhall. "Pray tell me, has my good cousin, Master Ralph Woodhall, a servant here with him?"

"I think he is absent, sir," replied the man, "on some business of his master's."

Robert Woodhall smiled; and then asked—

"Had he one with him when he arrived?"

"Oh yes, sir," replied the servant; "a man who calls himself Jack Tuckett; but he has been away for about a week, I think. I have not seen him at the third table."

"Thank you, that will do," said Robert Woodhall.

The man departed, and Robert then called in his own servant, Roger.

"Now, Roger," he said, "examine this letter accurately. You admitted that you read it. Now see if it be the same, in every respect, that you gave to me about an hour ago."

The man took the letter, opened it deliberately, read it all through, and then handed it back to his master, saying—

“It is the same.”

Robert threw it over to his cousin, who read it hastily, and then, turning sharply to the man, demanded—

“How came you by this letter? Who gave it to you?”

“Tell the truth, I command you, Roger,” cried his master; “the plain, straightforward, unadorned truth.”

“Certainly, sir,” replied the man; then, turning towards Henry, he added—“Nobody gave it to me. I picked it up.”

“That is a lie, Roger,” said his master. “I insist on your telling the truth, as you told it to me—about this letter, at least. I do not wish you to compromise others; and whatever you say that may compromise yourself, shall be forgotten and forgiven.”

“Very well, sir, I close the bargain,” returned Roger, with the coolest possible im-

pudence. "If the truth must be told, then, I was in the stable-yard to-night, when I saw Mr. Ralph's servant come in. I was rather anxious to know where he had been gone so long; and, seeing him go away for a lantern, I thought I might as well look whether he had got anything particular about his saddle. I could make nothing of that; but I found he had thrown his horseman's cloak over the beast's shoulder, and, in the pocket, I discovered the old bill I showed you, and that letter, which I read carefully and then brought to you. But I do hope, sir, you will send it to Mr. Ralph, for I am afraid there will be a fuss about it."

"We will take care of that, Roger," responded his master. "Have you any questions to ask him, Henry?"

"No," replied the other. "Roger is a damned scoundrel. But how do you make out the brothership? This billet is signed 'Kate Stilling;' the other man said Ralph's servant was called Jack Tuckett."

"A travelling name, sir, a travelling name," interposed Roger, mingling in the conversation. "I know the man quite well, and have seen his pretty sister Kate, more than once. He may call himself Jack Tuckett at the third table, if he likes ; but his real name is Gaunt Stilling, and so you will find him written down in the chamberlain's book ; for I saw it myself. For a couple of years, he was a soldier in the Tangier regiment ; and very likely called himself Jack Tuckett there ; for that honorable corps did not always like to go by their own names."

"Go away!" exclaimed Henry, sharply ; Roger quitted the room.

"There are now two things I have to ascertain," said Henry Woodhall, composing himself with a strong effort, which gave a stern rigidity to his manner. "First, whether Mr. Ralph Woodhall has been trifling with the affections of my sister. Secondly, whether the name of Gaunt Stilling is to

be found, as his servant, in the chamberlain's books here."

Robert nodded his head, but was silent ; and the other went on.

"All this must be done to-morrow, for it is too late to-night ; and, as soon as I am satisfied, we will converse farther, Robert ; for Ralph must be taught, if he have done these things, that they do not go without their reward. If I have done you injustice, my good cousin, I am very sorry for it ; perhaps it may be so, for when we find that we have been bitterly mistaken in one man, we may suspect that we have been as bitterly mistaken in another. Good-bye for the present."

"Good night!" returned Robert, who would not add another word, for fear of lessening the impression he had produced ; and they parted.

CHAPTER IV.

EARLY in the morning of the day after that of which we have just been speaking, a young gentleman walked up and down the terrace on the garden side of the Duke of Norfolk's palace in Norwich. His eyes were generally bent on the ground ; but ever, when he turned, he raised them for a moment to one particular window on the second floor of the building. His walk continued for fully half an hour uninterrupted. The guests and the servants had been up late ; and nobody found himself inclined to rise betimes, except that young gentleman, who, to say truth, had not closed

his eyes all night. The windows of the house were still defended from the attack of the morning sun, by the large gray wooden shutters, which folded over them from the outside.

At length, a solitary housemaid appeared at one of the doors which opened on the terrace, sweeping out a quantity of dust, mingled with flowers and bugles and other gew-gaws, without noticing at all whether, with them, might not be mingled diamonds, or rubies, or other precious things.

Shortly after, the window to which the young gentleman's eyes had been so frequently turned, was opened, and the shutters thrown back ; in the act of doing which, a maid's head and shoulders appeared. Instantly, the young gentleman stopped, saying, "Vernon, tell Margaret that I wish to speak with her as soon as she can admit me."

"Very well, sir," replied the maid, and withdrew her head.

Henry Woodhall took two or three more turns up and down the terrace ; and then, brushing hastily past the girl, who was sweeping out the hall, he mounted the staircase, and knocked at his sister's door. The maid admitted him ; and was about to re-commence her labours upon the toilet of Margaret, who was seated before a table near the window, with her beautiful hair hanging in large masses over her shoulders, when Henry turned towards her, saying, in an impetuous tone, "Leave us, Vernon. I wish to speak with my sister alone. You shall come back in a few minutes."

Margaret started up, at the sharp sound of her brother's voice, feeling some degree of alarm, which was only increased by the strange alteration she perceived upon his usually placable and good-humoured countenance.

The moment, however, that the waiting-woman had retired and closed the door, Henry's whole aspect softened. But Mar-

garet was still alarmed ; and, throwing her arms round his neck, she said, “ What is the matter, Henry ? You frighten me.”

Henry put one arm round her waist, led her gently back to her chair, and seated himself by her side. Then again, drawing her nearer to his heart, he said, in the kindest and tenderest tone, “ Dearest Margaret, I have come to comfort and console you. You and I are the only children of the house, Margaret. I have always loved you better than anything on earth ; and have seemed to have no wish, or hope, separate from your happiness. Let us, dear Margaret, have confidence in one another, and you will always find that you may rely upon me as a stay and counsellor in any moment of difficulty ; and that I will think of your happiness without any consideration of avarice, ambition, or prejudice, which may have weight with others.”

Margaret hid her face upon his shoulder ; but he could see the cheek, and temple, and

the fair, delicately chiselled ear, glowing like an evening sun-set.

“ You need not tell me, Margaret,” continued Henry. “ I know and see how it is with you and Ralph. But only speak, dear girl—only let me know how this came about. Has he sought you eagerly ?—Has he taught you to conceal this from my father and me, till this moment ?—Has he instilled into your mind lessons of concealment, from those who love you best ?—Has he taken advantage of my father’s kindness, secretly to win your heart, without a brother’s knowledge, and against a parent’s will ?”

“ Oh heaven, no—no ! cried Margaret, raising her head, and gazing on her brother’s face ; and then, with warm, impetuous words, which I cannot repeat for they were all confused—almost incoherent, but very natural.—She poured forth the whole tale of her love : shewing how, from early years—almost from infancy—she and Ralph had become

attached to each other ; how little kindnesses, and some important services, and frequent communication, and the interchange of mutual thought, had ripened early regard into fraternal affection, and warmed fraternal affection into mature love. Then she told him how, by the merest accident, their mutual feelings had become known to each other, and how they had trembled, and dreaded, and agreed that it was in vain to hope, and had determined to part ; how, in consequence of this resolution, Ralph had remained one whole vacation at his college, and how they fancied, in the end, they could meet calmly, and forget their love ; and how, when they *did* meet, they found that passion was stronger than reason, and that it was in vain to hope that the memory of first true love could ever be obliterated. Then she added, that Ralph had determined to go forth and seek his fortune, lighted on his way by the hope of winning her ; and how he had not even bound her

by any engagement, except that deep, strong bond of the heart, which she fondly fancied could never be severed. Then she once more hid her face on her brother's bosom, and tears told the rest.

Henry was a good deal moved. "His crime is not so great," he said, thoughtfully.

"Crime! crime!" echoed Margaret. "What do you mean, Henry?"

"Yes, crime," answered her brother; "for it is a crime, Margaret, to trifle with affections such as yours."

As he held her to his heart, he felt her shudder at the confirmation of the fears she herself had entertained. But Henry went on, determined to say all at once, to spare the pain of after explanations.

"There is more besides this, Margaret," he said; "more besides his conduct to you and to Lady Danvers. There are other affections he can trifle with—other hearts he can break. Margaret, I am moved by no pride—no family prejudice

—no desire of wealth. You could be happy, in spite of small means, with a man who deserved you ; but I tell you, my dear sister, you must think of this man no more, for he deserves you not."

"Other hearts he can break!" ejaculated Margaret, in a low, sad tone. "I do not comprehend you, Henry."

"There, read that letter, Margaret," said her brother, putting the billet he had received from their cousin into his sister's hands.

Margaret gazed at it, read it by fits and snatches, and then said, "I know not what this means.—Kate Stilling! Who is Kate Stilling?"

"An unhappy peasant girl," replied her brother ; "look at the back, Margaret. It was brought by his own servant after a long absence, and fell into my hands by chance."

Margaret turned the paper ; and, as her eyes rested upon the words of the address, she sank slowly down into the chair

from which she had just before risen, and the letter dropped upon the floor.

Henry thought she had fainted, and took a step to call for assistance ; but Margaret's voice stopped him.

"Stay, Henry, stay, I beseech you," she cried. "Say not a word of this to any one, if you love me indeed. Let us never talk of it, but when we are alone together. You shall henceforth know every thought of my breast ; only—only—beseech my father to quit this place at once. Tell him I shall be ill here. Tell him I shall die."

And, starting up with a burst of uncontrollable emotion, she sprang to the side of her bed, cast herself upon her knees, and, burying her face in the coverings, sobbed loudly and vehemently.

Henry gazed upon his sister for a moment with feelings of deep sympathy and compassion ; and then, hurrying out of the room, found her waiting-woman near the door.

"Go in to your lady, Vernon," he said.

“ Comfort her and soothe her ; but say no word of her state to any one ; for I had to grieve her much, and it would only double her grief if others were to know it.”

Thus saying, he strode on, and sought the higher chamber which had been assigned to his cousin Robert. The latter was still in bed and asleep ; but Henry soon roused him.

“ I have enquired, Robert,” he said, as soon as the eyes of his cousin were fully open, “ I have enquired ; and the whole of the tale you told me is but too true. Ralph is a scoundrel and a hypocrite, and must be punished. Get up ; you must bear him a billet from me.”

“ No need of such great hurry, Hal,” observed Robert, in his usual affected tone. “ Demme, Ralph is not a wild goose that will take wing every time you get near him. He will stay here as long as the bright Baroness does, believe me.”

“ But I must go,” rejoined Henry ; “ ay, and this very day. Margaret must be

here no longer. Last night, my father hesitated whether to go this morning or to stay another day, A word from me will turn the balance, and that word I will speak,"

"Your plan is a bad one, Hal," said his cousin. "If you attempt to bring your enemy to the ground this morning, you will be frustrated, depend upon it. All the world is up and busy : the Duke of Norfolk has eyes upon us all : there will be no slipping away unobserved for such a time as would be needful to get out of Norwich. No, no ; you must go more cautiously to work."

"But Margaret has besought me earnestly to have her taken hence at once," replied Henry ; "she says she shall die if she stays ; and, on my life, I think she says the truth."

"Well, have her taken hence," rejoined Robert ; "let her and your father go ; and let us stay behind—or, better still, let us all go. It will lull suspicion."

"Four-and-twenty hours shall not pass ere I have satisfaction upon Ralph Woodhall," said Henry, vehemently.

"No need that they should," answered his cousin ; "only hear me out. Send your cartel this morning, before you set out ; take it for granted at once that this ambitious youth will not refuse his good cousin a meeting at the sword's point ; and name the wilderness as the place, at any hour of the night when you can be sure by the almanac that the moon is up. Give him a hint that, though you seem to be going Londonward, you will be back for the pleasure of pinking his doublet ; and bid him come to the ground alone, as you will do."

Henry Woodhall mused for some time over this plan ; but eventually agreed to follow his cousin's suggestions ; and Robert, springing from his bed, soon produced writing materials for drawing up the challenge. Henry sat down to the table, and wrote for a few moments in a fine bold

hand ; and, when he had concluded, read aloud to his cousin, as follows :

“ Sir,

“ Your conduct, which I have had the sorrow and misfortune of discovering lately, and of which you yourself must be conscious ; the evil uses which you have made of my father’s unsuspecting hospitality and kindness ; and the pain and discomfort which you have occasioned in my family ; compel me not only to inform you that I can no longer look upon you as a relation, but to require that you give me immediate satisfaction for the injuries you have inflicted. The circumstances in which I am placed, drive me to abridge the usual courtesies upon these occasions ; for which I pray your excuse. To avoid all publicity, and the chance of interference, I shall, apparently, take my departure from Norwich this day ; but you will not fail to find me in the wilderness of the Duke’s house, near

the fish-pond, this evening at ten, when there will be sufficient moonlight for our purpose. I send you enclosed the length of my sword ; and if you be a man of courage, for which I give you credit, you will be at the spot appointed, and alone, as I shall be.

“I have the honour to subscribe myself your most obedient and very humble servant,

“HENRY WOODHALL.”

“Let me see, let me see,” said Robert ; and, taking the note from his cousin’s hand, he read it very carefully, pausing and pondering over every word. Some things he could have wished omitted ; but upon the whole it was better than he expected ; that is to say, more suitable to his purpose ; and, after some thought, he determined to let it go without alteration.

“Master Ralph,” he reflected, “will fancy that the whole weight of the offence is

having made love to my pretty lady, Margaret, contrary to the will and wishes of papa and brother. That can hardly be explained away, I think. Nevertheless, doubtless he will endeavour to explain it as best he can. He will not like fighting the brother; for, whatever comes of it, must be ill for him. I must contrive to stop all explanations, and bring them to the point of the sword. There, whatever they may do will be done for me."

This last thought carried his mind, for some little time, in a different direction. An important subject started itself, but he reserved it for future cogitation, and brought back his ideas to the affair of the present. He saw that he must prevent any communication between the two cousins; as explanation, if it did not absolutely lead to the discovery of his villany, would, at all events, frustrate his object, and throw suspicion on his character. To do so, however, was very easy. Henry's absence till the hour of

meeting, was all that was needful on one part ; and that was already arranged. The only chance of another turn being given to the whole affair, was, that Ralph, with his frank and open nature, might set out, as soon as he received the challenge, to follow Lord Woodhall and his family ; might meet all charges boldly, and explain his whole conduct. Some means, he thought, must be devised to prevent such an occurrence ; but he determined to leave that also for after consideration, and, by obtaining from Henry the task of delivering his letter, to delay its execution till after Lord Woodhall's departure.

“ Who shall I send it by ? ” said his cousin, interrupting his reveries somewhat impatiently.

“ Oh, I will take it, of course,” replied Robert. “ I think the best plan will be, Henry, for me to remain here another day. I can then get Master Ralph's answer.”

“ Remain or not, as you like,” returned Henry Woodhall ; “ but his answer I will

have before I quit this place, if any answer is to be given. I appoint a meeting. Any man of courage or honour will feel himself obliged to be there, without further question. Ralph is, undoubtedly, a man of courage. I have seen him tried, and I do not think he knows what fear is."

Robert felt that he had made a false step, but he hastened to retrieve it by another stroke of his art.

"Well then," he said, "let us send it by my servant Roger. He is skilful in all small diplomacies. He will be here in a moment. Fold it up, and seal it with your largest seal, remember, while I throw on a dressing-gown and seek my good man."

Henry Woodhall sat down to the table, and his cousin left the room. Close to his own door, he met his man Roger, coquetting with a pretty looking waiting-woman rather over-dressed. He had no hesitation, however, in breaking through their sweet conversation, by calling Master

Roger to the window at the farther end of the corridor.

"Who is that?" he asked, fixing his eyes upon the girl as she retreated towards the head of the stairs.

"Only Lady Danvers's waiting-woman," answered Roger, with a simper; "she is a sweet creature, and uncommonly kind."

"Ah," said his master. "Now listen to me." And he proceeded, in a low voice, to give the man the instructions which he thought needful. He repeated them twice over, with great precision; and each time Roger bowed his head, saying, "It shall be done, sir."

How he fulfilled his mission, I shall now proceed to shew.

Robert Woodhall returned at once to his own room, saying, as he entered, "I cannot find the scoundrel; but he will be here soon; for he knows my hour, and that I won't endure negligence."

Henry Woodhall rose, with a look of impatience, and walked up and down the

room. A few minutes after, there was a knock at the door, and the servant entered.

"You are late," said his master, in an affectedly sharp tone.

"No, sir—to a minute," replied Roger ;
"the castle clock is now striking."

"Well, that matters not," cried Henry.
"Take this letter to the room of Mr. Ralph Woodhall, and bring me back an answer, if he thinks fit to send one."

"Instantly, sir," said the man, taking the note with a very humble bow ; and, with a look of perfect unconsciousness, he quitted the room. He then directed his course at once towards the apartment of Ralph ; but he communed with himself as he went. "A guinea!" he said, "a guinea! and something more in prospect! Upon my soul, my honourable master is generous and free of his money. Hang me if I do not spoil this little scheme for him ; just to shew him that he cannot work without me. But I must be cautious, so that he does not find out who did it."

He put the letter in his pocket, and walked straight on to Ralph's door, where he knocked.

Now most of the rooms in the Duke's palace at Norwich, had an ante-room attached to them, which was the case here. The door was consequently opened, not by Ralph Woodhall himself, but by no less a person than Gaunt Stilling; and the servants of the two cousins stood face to face, eyeing each other for a moment, with a somewhat sinister expression, like two quarrelsome dogs meeting suddenly at the corner of a street, and deliberating, ere they set to, as to which shall give the first bite.

"Good morning to you, Mr. Stilling," said Roger, who was the first to drop his tail, if I may follow out my simile; for a soldier of the Tangier regiment might well be considered a very formidable opponent. "Let us forget all old grudges. I have had no share, for my part, in doing you any wrong; and now I bear a message from my master to yours, not very willingly, for,

to say the truth, I don't do much of my master's work willingly at all. But a man must gain his bread you know."

"What is your message?" asked Gaunt Stilling, sharply, adding something between his teeth, which the other did not hear.

"My master told me to say," replied Roger, "that he will be obliged if your master would be in this room of his at noon to-day, as he has something to say to him at that hour."

"Very well, so be it," said Gaunt Stilling, and was then about to close the door, which he held in hand, in the other man's face. A sudden change of thought seemed to come across him, however, and he opened it wider than before, saying, "Harkee, Roger, I do not believe you are so bad as the rest of them. I never saw you at our house with your scoundrel master; and if you take my advice, you will quit his service as soon as possible. Otherwise bad luck may befall you."

"Find me another place first, Mr. Stilling," replied Roger ; " but, however, I will talk more with you of it by-and-bye. I dare say we shall meet soon ; and I do not like my place much, I can tell you, in any way."

Gaunt Stilling nodded his head and shut the door.

Robert Woodhall's servant then directed his steps in quite a different direction from his master's chamber, found out Lady Danvers' waiting woman on the floor below, and whispered a word in her ear.

"A challenge !" cried the maid.

"Yes," replied Roger, in a solemn tone ; "about some words which passed between them last night in the ball-room."

"And when are they going to fight ?" said the young lady.

"Some time in the afternoon," replied Roger ; " but the hour I did not hear, for I was talking with a pretty little gill-flirt, of whom you know something, in the passage. She was as cruel as Queen Mary,

and made me lose the best part of the story. Can I find you again in an hour ?”

“Not you,” cried the girl, with a coquettish air.

“I am obliged to go now,” said Roger, “but will hunt the house for you very soon. Mind you don’t tell any one what I have told you.”

“Oh, dear no,” replied the girl ; “I would not tell any one for the world.”

And away she went, and told her mistress every word.

In the mean time, Roger made his way back to his master’s room, having calculated—for he was a great calculator—that the little interlude which had just passed, would precisely fill up the lapse of time that might have been consumed in reading the letter of which he was the bearer, if he had delivered it. He entered without ceremony, and, as he expected, the first question, was,

“Have you taken the letter?”

"Yes, sir," replied Roger, mentally adding, "and brought it back again."

"What was the answer?" demanded Robert Woodhall.

"Very short, sir," replied Roger. "All that he said, was, 'Very well, so be it.'"

"So I say too," cried Henry Woodhall; "so be it, Master Ralph. I knew he would not flinch, Robert; but now I will go and get my father and Margaret off as soon as possible, and return from our first halting-place, and join you here."

"Good!" ejaculated Robert, regarding his cousin with a slightly supercilious smile, which the other could not help remarking. His thoughts, however, were too busy with other things for any enquiry regarding the cause; and he quitted the room.

Robert remained seated, with his eyes fixed upon the table, and for some moments he was motionless as well as silent. There are people, however, who, with their thoughts very strong within them, love to have some active demonstration of the con-

clusions at which they have arrived. Robert Woodhall raised both his hands, and, with the first finger of the right, touched, first one and then another, of the left hand-fingers, pausing between the second and third, and then going on to the third and fourth.

"So," he said; "ay, so."

At that moment his eye rested on his servant Roger, and he exclaimed angrily, "What are you lingering for? Quit the room."

"I thought you might want me, sir," replied the man, "and you told me to bring the letter back again, and deliver it to you."

Thus saying, he placed the note before his master, and retreated to the ante-room; where he paused for an instant to consider what he termed "the finger-work."

"That is to say, as plain as it can speak," said Roger to himself, imitating his master's gesticulations: "finger one—Henry kills Ralph. Finger two: a troublesome rival

out of my way, and I revenged by another man's sword. Very good !—Finger three : Ralph kills Henry. Finger four : a better man than myself taken out of the world ; an everlasting barrier put between Master Ralph and Mistress Margaret ; Lord Woodhall without an heir, and I Baron Woodhall on his death. Very good indeed !—Clever, Master Robert, clever. I did not think you had so much wit ; but there are other witty people in the world, as well as yourself.”

CHAPTER XV.

WITHIN two hours after the events of which I have just spoken, the family of Lord Woodhall, (that is to say, himself, his son, and his daughter) took leave of the Duke of Norfolk, and—followed by a great mob of servants, mounted on horseback, as was the custom in those days—set out in the great family coach on the road to London. Robert Woodhall remained behind, upon some one of the many excuses for anything that he liked to do, which he was never without. He waited for a full hour, however, before he proceeded to take advantage of their absence, remaining quietly

in his own room all the morning, and cogitating with considerable satisfaction upon the probable result of the arrangements he had made.

About noon, however, he called his servant Roger, gave him the challenge, and told him to carry it to Mr. Ralph Woodhall. He did not choose to take it himself; for Ralph, he knew, was a little impetuous, and the pass of a sword between them might soon have given an entirely new face to the whole state of affairs. He was cautious, too, very cautious; and, in giving the letter into the hands of his servant, he said, "You need not tell him that I am still here. Let him think that I have gone with the rest, for he was not about when they departed. If he asks, you may say I will certainly be back to-night."

"I understand, sir, I understand," replied Roger, and away he went with the letter.

On knocking at Ralph Woodhall's door—carrying, this time, the letter openly in his

hand—he was once more encountered by Gaunt Stilling, who received him very graciously, and asked him to come into the ante-room.

“What have you got there?” asked Stilling, pointing to the letter.

“An epistle for your master,” replied Roger, with a certain significant smile, “which is to be delivered immediately, Master Stilling.”

“Mr. Ralph Woodhall is not here now,” said the other; “he was sent by the Duke to escort Lady Danvers on her way home.”

“I know that as well as you do,” returned Roger; “I saw him go, some time before our people; but I only obey orders, Master Stilling. Did you give him the message I left?”

“Certainly,” replied Stilling; “and he answered, as became him, ‘That if your master had anything to say to him, he must wait his time and convenience.’”

“Proud,” said Roger, with a laugh;

"proud, but quite right. I must give you the letter, however, though I suspect it will not reach him in time for its purpose."

"He will be back before nightfall," returned Gaunt Stilling, emphatically; "of that you may assure your master. Pray, what is the purpose of the letter, as you seem to know all about it?"

"A challenge, nothing but a challenge," replied Roger, with a jaunty air.

"Time and place appointed?" asked Stilling, quite quietly. "I suppose you know that too."

"Oh yes," replied Roger. "I do not think my master ought to have any secrets from so faithful a person as myself; and, therefore, to the best of my abilities, I remedy his negligence when he forgets to tell me anything. You see the letter is very convenient—folded up in haste, and the ends quite open. Just take a peep. There you will see—Place, the fish-pond at the end of the wilderness: time, ten

o'clock to-night, when the moon is well up : length of sword, twenty-eight inches."

"Ralph Woodhall will not stand upon an inch or two," observed Gaunt Stilling, with a grim smile. "You may tell your master, on my assurance, that Mr. Ralph will be back before sun-down, and will not fail to be on the spot named, at the hour appointed. Is your master here?"

Roger had the greatest possible inclination, for once in his life, to tell the truth ; but the reader will remark, that the telling of the truth, in this instance, would have been nearly equal in value to telling a lie, as it was a betrayal of his master's confidence, which might have been as satisfactory to him. However, the fear of something occurring to expose his disobedience, overweighed other considerations ; and he replied, "No, he has gone away, but he will come back with Mr Henry to-night."

"Good!" said Gaunt Stilling ; "good!

A pleasant afternoon to you, Master Roger."

"What?" asked the other, in some apparent surprise at the valediction.

"I only said, good morning to you," answered Gaunt Stilling, coolly. "I wish to be left alone."

This significant hint was sufficient, and Roger took his departure, to inform his master, that Mr. Ralph Woodhall would undoubtedly return before night, and would be at the place appointed. Robert was well satisfied ; but Gaunt Stilling was not completely so. He walked up and down the room several times, thinking deeply, and often muttering to himself.

"One push of a sword," he said, "and the account is settled. God speed the good lad's arm! Oh, if he had used the sword as much as I have! Yet he seems to fence well."

He then looked very hard at the letter several times, as if he had a strong incli-

nation to pry into the contents ; but, at length, he said—

“No, no—I remember what he said upon the road. I will not do a dirty action.”

Then, after having thought for a minute or two more, and felt, perhaps, very eager to see the whole, he said—

“Nay, I will put it on his table. There he will find it when he comes back.”

Let us pass over a few hours ; for long details will not suit at the conclusion of a volume, and we must hurry to the end of the first act of “this strange eventful history.”

It was night, and nearly ten o'clock. Two persons were in Robert Woodhall's room ; and his servant Roger was standing on the outside of the door.

“No, no,” said Henry Woodhall, whose face was somewhat pale and haggard. “I go alone. I insist that you do not come with me, Robert, nor follow me. Push over the light ; I wish to seal this letter.”

"Who is it to?" asked his cousin, rather eagerly.

"To the Duke of Norfolk," replied Henry; and he then added, in a calm and easy tone—"The issue of such encounters is always uncertain; the night is darker than I expected; and I may chance to fall. If so, I wish the Duke to know all about this affair. If I live, I can explain it myself."

"I will take care that it shall be delivered to him in case of such unlooked-for misfortune," returned Robert, in a tone of very well simulated apprehension.

"Your pardon, my good cousin," said Henry; "my own servant is below, and shall have orders to give it to the Duke, if I do not return. There, there," he continued, seeing that his cousin was about to remonstrate; "I will have my way, and have not time to dispute."

He took out his watch, and said—"Eight minutes." Then sealing the letter, he lifted his hat from the table, made sure that his

sword moved easily in its sheath, and, shaking his cousin's hand without another word, quitted the room.

Robert opened the door, and listened ; and it were vain to say that his heart did not beat. As soon as he heard his cousin's step on the stairs, he drew his servant into the room, and whispered, with a ghastly look and eager eye—

“ Follow him, Roger ; follow him, at a distance, to the fish pond, at the end of the wilderness. See what happens, and bring me information instantly of the result.”

The man departed without reply ; but a curious sort of smile was upon his lip as he walked along the corridor. A quarter of an hour passed, during which Robert continued to stride slowly up and down his room, with his hands clasped tightly together, his eyes straining upon the floor as if they would have burst from his head, and his cheek of an ashy paleness. The spirit of Cain was in his heart. He

felt—he knew—that, at that moment, he was committing murder. But the fiery torture of that deed, commencing generally in rage, and ending in remorse, with but one momentary point for act between them, was to him protracted through all those long, long minutes.

At length, he heard a step coming with lightning speed up the stairs, and the next instant his servant burst into the room. No smile was upon his face now. It was ghastly and full of horror ; and he panted for breath.

“ Speak, speak !” cried his master.
“ What has happened ?”

“ He is killed, sir,” replied the man.

“ Who, who ?” demanded Robert.

“ Mr. Henry, I believe—nay, I am sure,” answered Roger. “ The night is dark : there is a thin mist all over the ground by the side of the river : I could see nothing till I got very near ; but I heard the swords grating. After I came in sight, there were but three passes ; and then Mr.

Henry fell, and lay quite still.—Mr. Ralph is taller, is he not ?”

“ Yes, yes,” replied his master. “ Henry was my height ; Ralph much taller.”

“ Then Mr. Henry is gone,” rejoined the man, “ for it was the short one who fell. The business must have got abroad, for a number of the Duke’s people were hurrying out.—Hark ! They are bringing him up hither.”

“ Take the body to the room where he slept last night,” said the voice of the chamberlain upon the stairs. “ I will go and inform my Lord Duke.”

END OF VOL. I.

